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SERMONS ON REVELATION

Albert H. Baldinger, D.D.

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BY

ALBERT H. BALDINGER, D.D.

With a Foreword by

CHARLES FREDERICK WISHART

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SERMONS ON REVELATION

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

TO

THE MEMBERS OF MY SESSION

WHOSE FINE COMRADESHIP, UNFAILING CONFIDENCE
AND LOYAL CO-OPERATION
HAVE MADE MY MINISTRY
A JOY AND A SACRAMENT

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED

FOREWORD

THE *Book of the Revelation is one of the most fascinating adventures to be found in any literature. The child mind seizes upon it with avidity. For there are fairy story climaxes, hair-breadth escapes, magnificent fights, colossal victories. Strange, weird figures move across the screen, — angels and giants, horrid dragons and beautiful women, thrones of unimaginable glory and pits of fathomless blackness. There are gorgeous landscapes lit by lurid flames. There are trumpet peals and massed choruses like the voice of many waters. Above all, these colossal figures portray the never-ceasing conflict between good and evil, between light and darkness. And despite the artistic revolt of Mr. Havelock Ellis and other modern critics, this magnificent drama appeals to the deep-seated instincts which insistently demand a happy ending. If one were free to spend a lifetime, after German university fashion, in the study of one book, I can think of no more alluring field than the Revelation.*

I am happy that my old friend Dr. Baldinger has had the intellectual and doctrinal courage to strike out into this fascinating but difficult field. The highly-wrought apocalyptic style, with its gorgeous symbolism and artificial number systems furnishes a problem which is never even attempted

by that type of minister who works along the homiletic lines of least resistance. It is an encouraging sign among our younger ministers when we find a man willing and able to challenge these most difficult enigmas of interpretation. Surely in this time when men's hearts are failing them for fear, we have deep need of these invigorating and inspiring messages. Through this volume many should find new inspiration. May all who read it hear the angel comfortings of the glorious future amid the rabble's laughter in the mocking present. Surely this voice will steady us all who wait and work that by and by the kingdoms of this world may indeed become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ.

CHARLES FREDERICK WISHART

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PREFACE

WHEN in 1916, H. H. Powers wrote his searching analysis of the international situation in his book, "*The Things Men Fight For,*" he declared, "I have written this book because I couldn't help it." These sermons were preached because the preacher couldn't help it. For years the author has felt that too little was being said in the pulpit to offset certain fanciful interpretations and impossible views of the Revelation that were being promulgated with fanatical zeal. More recently a local "School of Religious Education" requested the writer to take a class through the Apocalypse, chapter by chapter, a task for which he felt at the time utterly unprepared. The request awakened interest, and along with it a resolve to make a more careful study of the book with a view to discovering for himself its inner message. While the matter was still under consideration, certain laymen in his church, for whose judgment he has the highest regard, suggested that in view of prevailing world conditions and present-day popular interest in "last days" and kindred subjects, a series of sermons on the Vision of St. John would be timely and profitable. The task of preaching such a series was therefore assumed not from mere choice but from inner compulsion.

Readers who may happen to pick up this volume

will do the author a service to remember that the sermons were prepared with no thought of publication. Neither were they prepared for "theologs," nor preached for preachers. They are in no sense controversial, and make no claim to scholarship. The average pastor with a "down-town" pulpit and study, bearing on his heart the cares and on his mind the problems and details of a city parish, must content himself with something other than a cloistered intellectual life. The sermons were prepared for, and preached without notes to a congregation of every-day busy people, composed for the most part of manual workers, tradesmen, clerks, school teachers, merchants and professionals, forming an average cross section of life in a typical industrial community. The form and content, the motive and mould of each sermon should be viewed from that angle alone. An eagle-eyed criticism may detect exegetical flaws, inconsistencies of statement, "flies in the ointment." Quite likely. So be it. Conviction remains, however, that the sermons on the whole proceed along the only path that will be regarded in the end as historically safe, intellectually sound or spiritually satisfying. With this brief apologetic, the author yields to the request of his friends to have these lectures go to print.

For help received in the preparation of the sermons, the writer acknowledges his indebtedness not only to the ordinary commentaries and exegetical helps that fill the average minister's shelves, but also to the following:

"The Lion and the Lamb" .....Thomas Osborne
"The Vision We Forget" .....Philip Whitwell Wilson

"Studies in the Book of Revelation" .....S. A. Hunter
"The Book of Revelation Not a Mystery" .David Keppel
"Light on Last Days" .....Charles A. Blanchard
"Lectures on the Revelation" .....William J. Reed
"The Millennial Hope" ..... Shirley Jackson Case
"The Coming of the Lord" .....James H. Snowden

ALBERT H. BALDINGER

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I

A MIRROR OF EVENTS

REVELATION 1:1–3, 9

BLESSED *is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein: for the time is at hand.* Rev. 1:3.

SERMONS ON REVELATION

I

A MIRROR OF EVENTS

REVELATION 1:1–3, 9

IN undertaking to discuss the Revelation in a series of Sabbath morning lectures, I feel much as Luke felt when he began writing his Gospel: Inasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters that are found in the Apocalypse, it seemed good to me also to trace the course of these chapters as accurately as possible, and to speak to you in their order that you might know what the book is all about.

Three facts regarding the Revelation are perfectly obvious, and they should challenge the interest of every truth seeker who loves his Bible.

It is a difficult book,—the most perplexing in the entire canon. It does not easily yield its meaning. The Sermon on the Mount is the primer of Gospel truth. The Acts is the geography and the arithmetic of the early church. The Epistles of Paul are expositions of the spiritual laws of the Kingdom. The General Epistles set forth the ethics of Christian living. But the Revelation is a philosophy of Christian history in the form of drama, made doubly difficult by its use of highly figurative language and extrava-

gant symbols. In attempting to interpret its scenes one cannot always feel dogmatically certain of his ground. Nevertheless there are rich treasures in the book. Much of its wealth lies on the surface, and that which lies in deeper veins is worth going after.

It is a much discussed book, never more so than now. An immense body of literature has grown up around it. A few weeks ago I spent an entire afternoon visiting three religious bookshops. If I had purchased all the volumes on the Revelation that were offered from shelves and catalogs, a truck would have been required to haul them home.

It is a much debated book. If in the spirit of Christian tolerance good men have to differ in their interpretations of its chapters, let us remember that even Paul and Peter engaged in controversy on so simple a matter as the basis of church membership. Paul felt obliged to resist Peter to the face. To have one's views openly and vigorously opposed is not ordinarily a pleasant experience, and yet it is one which a man can hardly expect to escape when he sets himself to the task of preaching through the Revelation. In view of the age-long controversies regarding the interpretation of the Vision of St. John, controversies that are still in progress, we are not so foolish as to suppose for a moment that what is said in these lectures will be a final word and will close the debate. The only way we shall ever arrive at a true understanding of the book is for every man to declare the best he can discover and the best he knows.

One thing is certain, you cannot throw the Revelation into the discard. It cannot be ignored. It

has woven its mystic threads inseparably into Christian thought and faith. It has written and chiseled its way into the masterpieces of art and literature. It was the Vision of St. John that inspired Dante's "Divine Comedy" and Milton's "Paradise Lost." It furnishes the climax of Bunyan's "Pilgrim's Progress." Its scenes have been transferred to canvas by the Raphaels, Michelangelos and Rossettis. It has been set to the music of the world's greatest hymns. Anthems and oratorios echo its finest notes. And somehow I cannot feel that we are foolish in trying to read and understand it, even though many others may be more competent to discuss its mystic chapters.

If any boy or young man here this morning ever goes to a theological seminary to prepare himself to teach the Bible and to preach the Gospel, one of the very first things his professors will seek to drill into his mind is this: To understand and rightly interpret any book of the Bible it is of prime importance to know its Author, its Time and Place of composition, and its Purpose.

First of all, then, the question, *Who wrote the Revelation?* It claims, of course, to have been written by John. Five times the author calls himself by that name. But there were many Johns in the early church, almost as many as in the modern church. There was John Mark, and John the Baptist, and John the Apostle, and John the Presbyter, and I do not know how many more Johns. In answer to this vexing question we can only note that from the earliest times the testimony has been almost unanimous that the author of the Revelation was John, son of Zebe-

dee, the disciple whom Jesus loved, who walked with Jesus in Galilee, beheld Him transfigured on the Mount, sat by His side in the upper room, saw Him crucified and buried, and spent some of the best years of his life cherishing the mother of his Lord. He remained in Jerusalem until its destruction by Titus. Later he became pastor of the Ephesian church, and suffered exile in the general persecution of that period. To those who say this was not the John who wrote the Apocalypse, that it was written by an unknown author bearing that name, let it suffice to say, in the words of another, "There is no satisfactory historical evidence of any other John in Asia, except the apostle, of sufficient standing or influence to have spoken to the churches with the authority of a prophet."

A second question follows, *Where was the Apocalypse written?* If you will locate yourself at Ephesus in Asia Minor and then go west about fifty miles, you will come upon a small rocky, irregularly shaped island in the Aegean Sea, called Patmos. It is mentioned in Scripture only once. To this island, we are told, many an offender of rank was banished during the Roman persecutions, to work in its mines and quarries. The aged pastor of Ephesus shared in that harsh lot, being banished "for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus."

It is said that the chief feature of the island at present is its Monastery of St. John, founded in 1088. Half way up the hill behind the monastery is a grotto known as the "Cave of the Apocalypse." It is still pointed out as the exact place where the Vision of John was seen. The rugged scenery of the island, with

its rocky shores ceaselessly pounded by the ocean, had much to do with the imagery of the book, as we shall discover.

When was "the Revelation" written? The book is so manifestly a message to suffering Christians that we are obliged to date it in connection with some period of bitter trial and persecution, an age that was "drunk with the blood of saints and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus." The author himself was a "brother and partaker with them in tribulation." There were two such periods of persecution in the first century, the first under Nero in the 60's and the other under Domitian in the 90's. We accept the view that the Revelation was written during the latter's reign.

The fires of Roman persecution were first ignited by the Emperor Nero. In his insane purpose to destroy every suggestion of old Republican Rome, he deliberately set fire to the city. For six days and nights the flames raged. Historic Rome went down in ruins forever. Discovering that he had gone too far, in order to divert suspicion from himself, he fastened the responsibility for the crime upon the Christians, "the only people in all the empire who offered heartfelt prayers for his government." The scenes of frightfulness that followed beggar description. The historian, Tacitus, throws a dreadful light on Nero's day, when after referring to the number of Christians who suffered and died as "a great multitude," he tells us, "Various forms of mockery were added to enhance their dying agonies. Covered with the skins of beasts, they were doomed to die by the mangling of dogs, or by being nailed to crosses; or to be covered with pitch

and set on fire and burned after twilight by way of nightly illumination. The emperor offered his own gardens for this show, and gave a chariot race, mingling with the mob in the dress of a charioteer." If ever a devil sat on an earthly throne, that devil was Nero.

In the confusion that followed the reign of the beast the Christians were probably given a respite for a period. When Domitian came to the throne the second great storm broke over the Empire. After repeated defeats his armies, in order to strengthen his crumbling throne and to save his royal face, he had images of himself erected throughout the empire and decreed emperor worship. To refuse to bow before his image was punishable by death. Christianity was at once threatened with extinction.

After the fall of Nero a strange superstition took hold of the people, especially in the eastern provinces. Many believed that he was not dead but had fled to the East and would one day return at the head of a Parthian army to overwhelm the empire. The superstition later took another form, and it was rumored abroad that Nero would one day rise from the dead, a demon ruler. " But," says John, " if the beast comes back, it will not be to sit on a throne, but to be cast into the abyss, into the lake of fire." It is quite possible that John saw in Domitian the reincarnation of the first anti-Christ, the unspeakable Nero. To whatever school of interpretation a man belongs, he is bound to read the Revelation of John in the light of the times in which it was written. Otherwise he is utterly unworthy of an intelligent hearing.

There remains a fourth question which is even more vital than any of the foregoing — *Why was the Revelation written?* What was its purpose? What is the message of this strange book? Amid the circumstances of those terrible days, would it not have been strange indeed if God had not inspired some gifted soul to write a message of comfort to the sorrowing Christians, seeking to steady their minds, and to make them willing to endure and to die, if need be, for Him who loved them and gave Himself for them? And who was better qualified by natural endowment, spiritual understanding, aye, and by bitter experience, to write such a message than John, the beloved disciple?

Let us, therefore, go through these chapters with ears alert and eyes open. What shall we hear and what shall we see? We shall see churches suffering, members cast into prison, having "tribulation." We shall see special rewards offered to "overcomers," even though "slain for the word of God." We shall see elect spirits "before the throne of God," who "came up out of great tribulation." We shall see a "dragon," foiled in his attempt to devour a new-born son, turn and persecute the woman, the child's mother. Defeated again, he "waxes wroth" and prepares to "make war on the rest of her seed." We shall see a sea-born "beast" with power to make war against the saints "and to overcome them," also an earth-born beast with authority to slay those who refused to "worship the image of the beast," and to deny those not bearing "the marks of the beast" the very necessities of life. We shall see "the mother of harlots" "drunk with the blood of the saints and the blood of

the martyrs of Jesus." We shall see men and women beheaded for the "testimony of Jesus." All this shall we see — and what shall we hear? Anthems and oratorios in which ten thousand times ten thousand and hundreds of thousands of voices are praising God and the Lamb because the blood of the saints was avenged, because Babylon, the city of sin, was overthrown, and New Jerusalem, the City of God, established. There is not a paragraph in the entire drama, not a voice in the entire twenty-two chapters, nor a single note in any of its seven anthems, that does not fit into the author's purpose to strengthen the morale of suffering, discouraged Christians. One cannot read the book thoughtfully and escape the conclusion that it was born "in an hour of trial, with God as its father and necessity for its mother."

For his purpose John dramatizes three master truths: (1) All history, even in its darkest chapters, is moving steadily toward the eternal purposes of God. Worldly powers and principalities of evil cannot thwart that purpose. (2) The goal of human history is the Holy City, a redeemed world society subject to the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. (3) The chief agency in the accomplishment of this purpose is the living Church against which the world, the flesh and the devil can never prevail. If in the course of these lectures we fail to make these facts stand out with convincing effect, then we shall have missed the message of the pulpit of Patmos.

When the purpose of these sermons was first announced a friend said to me, "You have chosen a difficult road to travel. I believe the Revelation is

a sealed book and that no mortal man knows what it is all about." I cannot persuade myself that such is the case. I cannot believe that, though it was written in good Greek and has been translated into good English, it was never intended to be read, and, if read, could never be understood. The author evidently did not feel he was writing an impossible book when he said, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."

II

THE TRUMPET VOICE

REVELATION 1:10–3:22

I WAS *in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet saying, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it to the seven churches; unto Ephesus, and unto Smyrna, and unto Pergamum, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.* Rev. 1:10, 11.

II

THE TRUMPET VOICE

REVELATION 1:10–3:22

A PROMINENT educator, the president of one of our colleges, declares that he has listened to good preaching and the preaching of good men all his life, but that he does not recall in all his experience having heard more than five sermons on the Book of Revelation. The reason assigned for this apparent neglect of a book which in a sense is the climax of Scripture, is the fact, real or supposed, that most ministers feel that its meaning is hopelessly, if not purposely, obscured beneath figures and symbols which cannot now be interpreted or understood, the key having been lost.

I do not know how many Sabbath days we shall turn to the pages of this strange book for a morning lesson, but this much is certain — when we have finished, if any member of the church is still in a position to say that he never heard more than five sermons on the Apocalypse, he will have himself to blame and not the ministry. Neither a false modesty, nor the absence at certain points of cock-sureness, nor a feeling of deference to the opinions of other more (or less) capable interpreters, shall be regarded as a sufficient excuse for shirking our self-imposed task of sermonizing this interesting book. Humbly, but frankly, I feel

quite as competent to wrestle with its horned beasts, its music and mathematics, as many another whose chief qualification as an interpreter would seem to be a fanatical zeal for certain impossible theories.

Last Sabbath we were speaking of the Apocalypse as a "Mirror of Events." It was written near the close of the first century, during the reign of Domitian, the twin beast of Nero. Its author was the Apostle John, a "fellow partaker" in the tribulation of that period. His purpose in writing was to reassure, to comfort and to strengthen the morale of his readers that they might be willing to suffer and not unwilling to die, if need be, for Christ's sake.

What is said this morning will cover the entire first three chapters of the book. They contain in substance the seven messages delivered direct to the churches in Asia Minor. As we listen to the trumpet voice sounding in these messages, three main truths stand forth:

I. *The first thing of importance to that age or to any age is the living church.* Visualize, if you can, the circumstances amid which John wrote. Christians everywhere were passing through troublous days. The world for them was out of joint. Their lives were in daily jeopardy. From the throne room on the Tiber came the royal edict, "Down with the Nazarene; up with the image of the emperor; him shalt thou worship." Those who refused died or suffered a worse fate. Christians were forbidden to congregate. They were driven into dens and caves and catacombs. They had no rights, no rest, no peace, no liberty, no safety. Men cried, "How long wilt Thou forget us, O God,

shall it forever be?" Many were asking, When will the City of God come, when the millennium? When will Christ return, and where is the sign of His coming?

John answers these heart questions in a book twenty-two chapters long, and he begins by concentrating attention on seven little struggling churches "too insignificant to be even mentioned in the annals of Imperial Rome!" Amid the trouble and the turmoil John heard a trumpet voice, a voice heralding a message across the Aegean to the hills and mountains and valleys of Asia Minor where little churches flickered like candles in a blustery night. What the voice said in effect was this — "Never mind the Emperor, the throne, the royal edicts, the colosseums with their lions and leopards; be not disturbed by the chaos and the welter. What is of supreme moment to God is the churches. He will not forget His own."

It must always be so. What goes on in parliaments, in council chambers and court rooms, in city streets and country lanes must be of deep concern to that Infinite Mind that broods over men and nations. All that men do has a bearing on the progress of his Kingdom. But when the world is out of joint, when the minds of men are disordered and darkness is on the face of the deep, God's supreme concern must always be with the actual living church, with the missions and chapels, the abbeys and cathedrals where men's faith is steadied, thought is clarified, ideals are lifted, convictions are born and character is made. Those who imagine that in this big, noisy, roaring world, it matters very little what goes on in churches, imagine vain thoughts. They think foolishly. John

knew better, and God knows better, and every man who is capable of serious thinking, knows that as goes the church so goes civilization.

II. *The first thing of importance to the church is a vision of the power and majesty of the living Christ.* The one thing John wanted those tempted, suffering Christians to get, clear and strong, was a vision of the reigning, triumphant Christ, just as the seer himself saw Him on Patmos. Therefore, ere passing into the blood and thunder and welter of succeeding chapters, he would have them see the King. Before they march forth to battle, let them visit headquarters and meet the Field Marshal. Before sailing the stormy sea, let them be aware of the Captain and let the consciousness of the presence of Him who pilots the ship nerve their souls for the journey.

So John, being in the spirit on the Lord's day, heard a trumpet voice and, turning, "saw one like unto the Son of Man." And what was his appearance? His hair was white, perfectly white; he is the Ancient of Days. Over his shoulder was a priestly robe; he is the Mediator between God and man. There was a girdle about his breast, a golden girdle; he is the King of Kings. His feet were burnished brass, they were hard, tramping out all opposition. His voice was like the ocean booming along the shores of Patmos; he makes himself heard. A sword was in his mouth, two-edged and terrible; he smites the hearts of men. In his hand were the stars. The stars were the seven churches. He held them like a string of glittering jewels above the fogs that would envelop them and the floods that threatened to engulf them.

It is a picture of the risen, glorified Christ, hanging at the approach to the book, in the corridor of the temple. It is the unfurling of a victory banner on Signal Mountain before the battle begins. Could you imagine anything better calculated to nerve Christian men and women who were passing through fearful suffering? And I do not know of anything that will so steady our faith amid these uncertain days as a deep-seated conviction that the great Christ lives — lives; He is not dead. It may be a day of chaos, a wild blustery night, a storm-swept international sea, — what odds? The King of Kings is on His throne! He is the Rock of Ages. He will yet break the breakers and rule the storm.

III. *The first thing of importance to Christ is the faith and the life of the church, its spirit, its ministry, its endurance.* I would have you read again those seven short, crisp love letters addressed to the churches of Asia Minor. We cannot pause to speak of each separately, though each contains a volume of sermons. The churches are seven. It is the first occurrence of a numeral and the book is filled with symbolical numbers. Some of them are confusing, like "six hundred and sixty-six," and the "thousand years." Before we shall have completed our study, there will be occasion to speak more at length on the arithmetic of Revelation. Suffice to say now that we must interpret all numbers in the book symbolically or we must take them all literally. That the former is the case seems perfectly obvious except to certain literalists whose mechanical interpretations have been repeatedly discredited in the light of history.

The first number used is seven. It is the symbol of completeness, wholeness. Let these seven letters, therefore, stand as a sevenfold message to the church universal. What is it in the church that is of paramount importance to Christ? Every one of these letters opens with, "I know." What does Christ know about these churches? What interests Him? Not their buildings, their equipment, their membership, their finances. All those material aspects of the church to which we attach so much importance are ignored. What is of paramount importance to Him is the life resident in the organization. Ephesus is a disloyal church, many of her members having been cast into prison. Christ is there, alive — and that is enough. Pergamos is a decadent church saturated with the religion of Balaam and the doctrines of the Nicolaitanes. Thyatira is a declining church, poisoned by the seductions of the woman Jezebel. Let Thyatira beware of the flaming eyes of her Lord. Sardis is a lifeless church, having a name that she lives, but is dead. What does Christ care about her popularity? Philadelphia is a steadfast church, holding fast the word of power. She is therefore a vital part of the body of Christ. Laodicea is a self-deceived church, cursed with neutrality, being neither cold nor hot. Before God she is poor and blind and naked, though she is rich. In each case the Lord knows the "works" of the church and the spirit resident in the church, and into the ears of each sounds the warning — "I know you as you are, not as you seem."

Each letter includes also a second word — a word not of warning, but of promise to "him that over-

cometh." Remember, John was writing to quicken the souls of discouraged disciples, those whose hearts and homes were breaking up, many of whom wavered, not knowing whether to stand firm in the faith, or to seek safety in flight, or to surrender all. Oh, you tried, discouraged burden bearers of the world who still sit in the "seven" churches, you who know the bitter experiences and conflicting emotions of life — take this seven-fold word of promise and let it lie there like a benediction on your heart. "To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God," — "he shall not be hurt by the second death," — "to him will I give of the hidden manna," — "to him will I give authority over the nations," — "I will in no wise blot his name out of the book of life and I will confess his name before my Father and before His angels," — "I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God," — "and I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne." Why, these promises were written not only for those who first read John's message, but for some of you who sit here this morning. All the promises of God are yours in Christ. "Wherefore lift up the hands that hang down, and the palsied knees." Take your life up gladly, bear it on bravely, and in the end lay it down triumphantly, and let your song always be

"Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee,
E'en tho' it be a cross that raiseth me."

III

THE SEER IN HEAVEN

REVELATION 4:1–11

AFTER *these things I saw, and behold, a door opened in heaven, and the first voice which I heard, a voice as of a trumpet speaking with me, one saying, Come up hither, and I will shew thee the things which must come to pass hereafter.* Rev. 4:1.

III

THE SEER IN HEAVEN

REVELATION 4:1–11

WHAT one sees depends upon one's point of view. Stand on the street and you see only the walls of the buildings. Stand on the roof of the tallest building and you see city blocks. Climb to the highest hill and you see an entire city. Mount up in an airplane and you see vast stretches of country. The higher you go the more perfect and comprehensive is your view of earth.

The Revelation, from the fourth chapter through the twenty-second, is a description of world events as seen from heaven. It is not a review of the past. The author is not writing history. It is not in any special sense a pre-view of the future. Neither are its visions limited to John's own day. It is a super-view of life, a pageant of history viewed from above, a vision of earthly things mirrored in heaven.

So John tells us he was summoned by a trumpet voice through an open door in heaven where he was to witness the pageant of "things that must come to pass." When he was caught up in the spirit, what did he see?

First of all, *a throne set in heaven,* a throne of power at the center of the universe. One sat upon the throne whom he could hardly see, so brilliant the vision, so blinding the light that dazzled like the colors

of precious stones. Thunder pealed from the throne, lightning flashed, fire burned. Arched above and around this throne-like storm center with its thundering symbols of judgment and destruction, was a rainbow, the ancient seal of an unbroken covenant between God and his people. Thunder and lightning issues from the throne of the Eternal — let sin and wickedness be warned. A rainbow around the throne — let lovers of God feel secure.

In the second place, John saw *twenty-four minor thrones,* twelve thrones multiplied by two. Twelve is the church number, the sign of God's chosen people. Four, the earth number, multiplied by three, the divine number, suggests the fact that redeemed society is possible only when the human is modified by that which is divine. There were twelve patriarchs in the Old Testament church and twelve apostles in the New Testament. The representatives of the church in both dispensations are, therefore, seen upon thrones with Christ in glory. They are arrayed in white, they wear crowns, they exercise authority. Recall what the Spirit promised to the churches, "Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee the crown of life"; "to him will I give to sit down with me on my throne"; "to him will I give authority over the nations," and "he shall be arrayed in white."

Organizations and institutions, even churches, may fail, but great and good men, the redeemed of God, endure. The Old Testament church accomplished its mission and passed away, but Moses lives on. The seven churches of Asia Minor crumbled and disappeared, but John abides. Jerusalem may lie a heap

of ruins, but Isaiah continues to reign on his throne of spiritual authority. The church at Antioch may be a memory, but Paul remains a power throughout Christendom. Time will one day raze St. Peter's of Rome and St. Paul's of London, but Michelangelo and Sir Christopher Wren will live on. The Presbyterian church may some day lose its identity, but Calvin and Knox are beyond the reach of time. So with Martin Luther, John Wesley and George Fox. Whatever becomes of the institutions they founded, great and good men who have labored heroically on the walls of Zion continue to live on spiritual thrones, exercising authority over the minds and consciences of men.

In the third place, John saw *four living creatures*. Full of eyes, they stood in the midst of the throne and round about it. The first was like a lion, the second resembled an ox, the third had the head and the face of a man, and the fourth the appearance of an eagle. That John borrowed this imagery from Daniel is perfectly obvious.

What do these four living creatures represent? It is generally understood that they symbolize the power, the patience, the intelligence, the swift movements of God in all nature and history. There is no difference of opinion among interpreters as to that. John tells us to call to mind the lion in his strength, the ox with his patience, man with his intelligence, and the eagle with his swift movements, and remember that the power, patience, intelligence and activity displayed in creation are but attributes of God mirrored in nature. When these living creatures join in singing as all nature sings, "Holy, Holy is the Lord God, the Almighty,

which was, which is and which is to come," the redeemed in glory sing back, "Worthy art Thou, our Lord and our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for Thou didst create all things and because of thy will they were created."

The thing that held John optimistic in a day when the churches seemed to be crumbling and the power of evil seemed unchecked and unchallenged, was this fact — he was perfectly sure of God, sure of Christ. As he writes, so he sings, "Nations may rage, the kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers take counsel against the Lord and against his anointed, but He that sitteth in the heavens" is still supreme. He will not abdicate his place at the center of the universe and he cannot be impeached. The storms of earth, social revolutions and national upheavals cannot disturb the crystal sea of glass before His throne. Churches may fail, the candles may flicker and go out, the world may knock down the lamp stands, church buildings may be sold to the highest bidders, they may kill the leaders, exile the saints and scatter the flocks to the four winds, all of which they did and still do in Russia and Turkey; but the throne of the universe is built on justice and truth. That cannot be shaken. Whatever becomes of the visible church in a day of bitter persecution, there still burns before the throne that which makes the church possible and worth while, namely, the Holy Spirit of God. Let men destroy the externals of religion, if they will, the flame is unquenched and the heat of it and the light of it will rise again, re-creating churches and all other institutions necessary to the accomplishment of His eternal purpose.

This fourth chapter, therefore, is a description of the throne of God painted in such realistic colors as to impress the readers with a sense of its enduring power and glory. The tried saints of those days needed above everything else, not "a panorama of events running through six thousand generations to come, but the sight of a pageant of power which would be available to them in their own generation." To convince them of that power is the major purpose running through the entire drama.

What a poet is John! He does not talk like a logician, he is not writing an essay or a history. Mathematics and prosaic things do not interest him. He is a prophet preacher with the heart and the mind, the imagination and the inspiration of a poet. In a recent character sketch of Charles H. Spurgeon, Lloyd George, recalling the imaginative qualities of the great preacher, says: "He lifts you up on his great fancy with strong wings; he carries you through the air, blue, clear, above the highest clouds, and when you come down you are not tired, you are throbbing and thrilling with the joy of what you have done." So with the seer of Patmos: He lifts you up on the strong wings of his imagination; he carries you through the heavens, high above the fogs and clouds, and when you come down you are not tired, you are thrilling with what you have seen and heard.

Such a vision of God's throne as John sees, may mean very little to us now-a-days. Our lives are too easy going. We sit luxuriously in our upholstered chairs or lounge lazily in our hammocks or we sit there comfortably in our pews with no thought of danger anywhere within a thousand miles. We read the Vision

of John with " the pleasant feel of limp morocco leather between our fingers." We fail to realize what these words, scrawled in bold letters on rude parchment, meant to those little groups of Christians meeting in secret, in daily jeopardy of their lives. When the message was first read to them, none in the group slept; they leaned forward, they listened eagerly, their hearts throbbed. Every sentence would be read and reread, and read again until every syllable would be known by heart.

John on Patmos is Paul at Corinth writing to the Romans, " If God be for us who can be against us? " He is Luther in the castle of Wartburg, singing, " Ein Feste Burg ist Unser Gott." He is Garfield standing in New York on the day when the great Lincoln fell, calming the excited throng with " God reigns and the government at Washington still lives." He is Frederick W. Faber singing,

" Blest too is he, who can tell
That God is on the battlefield
When He is most invisible."

When " the storms roll up the sky," when darkness is thick and troubles are real, if we can believe what John knew, that the throne of the Eternal is the same yesterday, to-day and forever, we will still sing with Browning, no matter what the day, —

" God's in His heaven,
All's right with the world,
He mounts the storm and walks upon the wind."

IV

TEARS IN HEAVEN

REVELATION 5:1–14

AND *I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book, or to look thereon: and one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not: behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome, to open the book and the seven seals thereof.* Rev. 5:4, 5.

IV

TEARS IN HEAVEN

REVELATION 5:1–14

BEFORE proceeding any further with these discussions, a word of warning is in order. A series of sermons on the Revelation cannot be a series of so-called "popular sermons." In the nature of the case they must be expository, and expository sermons are seldom "popular" except to Bible lovers and Bible students. Persons who may have itching ears to hear the pulpit discuss current topics of the day will doubtless go elsewhere to have their ears tickled during these studies. Those who may stay with us as we move through the amazing chapters of this book will probably discover in the end that they have not traveled an unprofitable course. We ask for nothing more than a patient hearing on the book, coupled with a careful reading and an intelligent searching of its chapters.

Bear in mind what has already been said. I repeat it — the Revelation is not a review of the past, nor a pre-view of the future, but rather a super-view of the course of life on this earth. It is a pageant of earthly events staged in heaven. John saw it in vision, and the Revelation is a description of what he saw. His purpose was to assure the tried saints of those days that God had not forgotten them and that His power

was infinite and available for their needs, for their comfort and their encouragement.

The key to the fifth chapter is the fourth verse. John saw a door open in heaven and heard a voice like a trumpet saying, "Come up hither and I will shew thee the things that must shortly come to pass." He entered the open door and began to look around, to ask questions. His first emotion was one of tears. He "wept much." So did Elijah, so did Jeremiah, so has every great prophet. Tears are the price we pay for spiritual insight and progress.

"For a tear is an intellectual thing,
And a sigh is the sword of an Angel-King,
And the bitter groan of a martyr's woe
Is an arrow shot from the Almighty's bow."

But what was John doing with tears in heaven? Does he not tell us himself, more than once, that God "shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," "Neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more?" Is it not evident at once that the visions of the Apocalypse cannot be taken prosaically. They do not form a book of logic or history. To attempt to read the Revelation as one would read the Epistle to the Romans would result in all sorts of impossible interpretations. It is spiritual poetry. John was still in the flesh, there on the Island of Patmos; only in mind and spirit was he caught up in rapture. He is describing in this chapter the sentiments, the emotions that were stirred within him by the thoughts that passed through his inspired imagination.

What caused John's tears? Probably the same thing that has caused some of you to cry on occasion. He wept for the same reason that some of you have been heart stricken and comfortless. It was the mystery of divine providence, the strange, unexplained ways of God. Can I awaken somebody's memory here this morning? That dark night, maybe years ago, when the flood swept down on your home, threatening to overwhelm you, and you thought you could not possibly carry the pain, the burden, the heartache, the disappointment. You remember it as though it occurred yesterday. And do you recall how you thought the trouble could have been borne more easily if you had known what purpose God had in permitting it? The thing that caused the deep shadow to turn into thick darkness was the impossibility of reconciling your experience with God's wisdom and goodness.

I will tell you the question those tried saints of the early church were asking. It was the same question that has been asked in every age since, a question that some of you are asking even now — How was it possible to reconcile the frightful persecutions of the church, the fearful sufferings of God's people, with the power and the wisdom and the goodness of God? If God were indeed Almighty and if He were present in that holocaust of suffering, why did He permit it? Earth had no satisfactory answer to that question. The human mind had none. It has none now. Science and philosophy furnish no clue to the question. Life with its problems and experiences, apart from God, is a sealed book. Whence came we? Why are we here? Why must we suffer? Ask these questions of

life and the only answer you get is the answer of the silent Sphinx there on the sands of Egypt.

In the drama of the Revelation, the seer is supposed to go to heaven (he really goes to the heart of the religion of Christ) to find an answer to that question, and he is at first disappointed. The great mystery of life lies a sealed book in the hand of God, sealed with seven seals, perfectly sealed. Exactly so. Who by searching can discover the ways and plans, the secret purposes and counsels of the Eternal? John hears a strong angel challenging the souls in heaven with a loud voice, saying, "Who is worthy to open the book and explain its secrets?" Mark you, "who is worthy?" not who is skillful enough or wise enough or strong enough, but who is worthy, who has character enough, who has drunk deep enough at the fountain of life, who is enough like God, to unlock the secrets of heaven? "No one in the heaven or on the earth or under the earth" was able. John's heart went heavy, he was disappointed, he wept. We can understand his tears when we remember that on the unsealing of that book and the revelation of its contents depended the possibility of counseling and encouraging the churches that trembled in the throes of a great persecution.

What caused John's tears to cease? His disappointment did not last long. He soon forgot his tears. One of the elders came and said, "John, do not cry about it any more." Notice it was one of the elders who said that, not one of the angels who had never walked this earth and had never tasted the waters of Marah; but one of the redeemed, one who had known sorrow, having walked the heavily shadowed path of

life. The elder said to John, "Weep not, for behold the Lion of Judah, the root of David, hath overcome to open the book," to explain the mind and secret purposes of God.

When John looked he saw standing by the throne, not a lion but a lamb as though it had been slain, a lamb with seven horns and seven eyes, symbolic of perfect power based on perfect knowledge. It was none other than the Christ who had sacrificed all, suffered all, had forgiven all and knew all. The Lamb took the book of the mystery of God and broke its seals.

If this vision teaches anything at all, it clearly teaches this, that the love and purpose of God are disclosed only in Christ, through His incarnation and suffering. If Christ cannot solve the riddle of life, it has no solution. If He cannot answer the questions of the heart, they must go forever unanswered. If He cannot satisfy the deep longings of the soul, there is no satisfaction. If there is no balm in Gilead, there is no healing anywhere.

But John's tears were forgotten for another reason. There was music in the skies; there was singing in heaven. Naturally, tears could never last long in heaven anyway, unless they were the tears of joy and rapture.

When it is seen that Christ holds the key for unlocking the secret thoughts and purposes of God, there is a burst of praise in heaven such as earth never heard. "They sing!" What do they sing? "A new song." Back in the fourth chapter we heard another song. It was the old song of creation. In the Gospel of Luke

we heard still another anthem, the song of the Incarnation. But John now hears a "new song," the song of redemption. It was first heard from those who had most to be thankful for. The four and twenty elders, the redeemed representatives of the church, are the first to catch up its notes as they sing "Thou art worthy to take the book and to open the seals thereof; for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kingdom, and tongue, and people, and nation, and hast made us unto our God kings and priests, and we shall reign on the earth." Turning, John sees an innumerable host of angels, "ten thousand times ten thousand and thousands of thousands." Chorus answers chorus as angel choirs sing back "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honor, and glory, and blessing." As the great oratorio of the Messiah rolls through the corridors and sweeps through the temple of heaven, John listens and hears its notes echoed from the earth beneath, from "every created thing which is in the heaven, and on the earth." All redeemed nature was singing, "Unto Him that sitteth upon the throne and unto the Lamb, be the blessing, and the honour, and the glory, and the dominion, for ever and ever."

Such was the new song of redemption that thrilled John's soul. Some day, we, too, shall hear that song and join in the singing. Some of the dearest songs we sing here on earth will not be sung over there. If some minister were requested to conduct services in heaven and should announce, "Lead, Kindly Light, amid the encircling gloom," angels would protest,

"Brother, there is no encircling gloom here." And how could we sing "Almost Persuaded" in a land where everybody is persuaded? Who will want to sing "Abide with me, fast falls the eventide," or "Work for the Night is Coming," in a city where "The Lamb is the light thereof," and there are no candles, no night, no eventide, no shadows? Some of us are Psalm singing folk, as our forefathers were. We love the songs that David wrote, the hymns he thrummed on his harp. They have lived long and they never grow old. They have strength, dignity, enduring quality. And who knows, maybe we shall sing some of the Psalms of David in "Beulah Land?" But it will be assuredly a revised Psalter. Many of its numbers will be missing. Even the twenty-third Psalm, noblest of all church hymns, will have lost some of its notes. We may sing "The Lord is my Shepherd," but how shall we sing, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow?" Whatever songs may be sung or omitted in the Holy City, there is one anthem in which all will join. We will all sing the "new song," the song of redemption. If we are to sing it there, we must learn to sing it here. You have got to learn its notes to-day to be able to sing the song to-morrow. You cannot join the redemption chorus yonder unless you get in tune with redemption here. For "no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, they which were redeemed from the earth."

V

THE FOUR HORSES OF THE APOCALYPSE

REVELATION 6:1–11

AND I *saw when the Lamb opened one of the seven seals, and I heard one of the four living creatures saying as with a voice of thunder, Come. And I saw, and behold, a white horse, and he that sat thereon had a bow; and there was given unto him a crown: and he came forth conquering, and to conquer.* Rev. 6:1, 2.

AND *when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?* Rev. 6:9, 10.

V

THE FOUR HORSES OF THE APOCALYPSE

REVELATION 6:1–11

THE fourth chapter is a vision of the throne of God. The fifth is a vision of the Lamb of God. He is in the midst of the Father's throne, having conquered and won his place through sacrifice. In all our travels through the book we shall never get very far away from that central figure of the Christ. We shall go through war and slaughter, through famine and pestilence, fire and hail, blood and thunder, but always above the confusion, above the noise and the din of battle, will be seen the radiant figure of the Redeemer, moving steadily toward the New Jerusalem, the City of God let down from Heaven. Out of the currents, the cross currents and counter currents of life a new world will be fashioned, though not without fire and blood.

Recall what was previously said. The question that troubled those early Christians was the mystery of God's ways on earth. Like many others in every generation, they were unable to reconcile their sufferings with the power and wisdom and love of God. Finding that earth had no satisfactory answer to the riddle of life, John seeks an explanation in Heaven. But even in Heaven there was no one who could explain the secret purposes of the Almighty. So it seemed. John at first was disappointed until he dis-

covered that the Lamb in the midst of the throne could unlock the mind of God, that only in and through Christ could the meaning and mystery of life be understood.

The Lamb takes the book from the hand of God and, breaking its seals one after another, liberates the truth. But instead of revealing at once the mysterious purposes of God, the seals deal with the cold facts of history, the hard facts of life, with which many of his readers were only too familiar. John tells them that the things that were happening in the world by the permissive acts of God would continue to transpire for many years to come. He would not try to comfort and encourage his readers by holding out false hopes. He would not have them live in a fool's paradise. Not one word of truth would he keep back.

The breaking of the first four seals results in the release of "The Four Horses of the Apocalypse." Modern fiction and drama have awakened popular interest in the phrase. But what does it mean? There are those who would have us believe there is something very mystical about these four horses which John sees thundering across the fields of history, something so profoundly theological and millennial that only the superwise can understand the vision. Sundry teachers to the contrary notwithstanding, I venture to think they represent the commonplace facts of history. John was now a man of probably four score years and ten. His value as an interpreter and a teacher lay in the ripeness of his years and the richness of his experience. He had not lived in vain. He was no misguided saint. He knew life in his own day and he was not unfamiliar

with the past. He had seen the imprints of the horses' hoofs on all the pages of history and knew they would continue to be driven across the years.

In the ancient Hebrew economy the horse had no honorable place. Go back to Genesis and tabulate the assets of Abraham or make an inventory of Job's wealth. You will find not a horse. The Horse was a symbol of war, never a symbol of wealth. Elijah ploughed with oxen while the horses neighed for the battle. "Tell the daughter of Zion," cries the prophet, "Behold thy King cometh unto thee — riding upon an ass." But when the ruthless conqueror came to Zion, when Pharaoh-Necho came, and Nebuchadnezzar and Alexander and Titus, they came riding horses. The horse stood to the Jew, not for industry and happiness, but for the curse of militarism. With that fact in mind, it is not difficult to understand the horses that gallop in the drama of Revelation.

First, a *White Horse.* In the triumphal marches in Rome the victor always rode at the head of his troops on a white horse. The white horse is the conqueror celebrating his triumph. It is the victor who conquers by right of might. It is Pharaoh-Necho on the plains of Megiddo. It is Titus riding into the blood-red streets of Jerusalem. It is Attila, the Hun, riding across the plains of Italy. It is Genseric, the Vandal, sacking Rome. The White Horse is Mohammedanism crossing the Pyrenees and riding triumphantly into Europe, or Napoleon after the battle of Jena trampling down the armies of Frederick William III, and riding triumphantly into the streets of Berlin, sacking its treasures of art and gold. It is Bismarck after the

battle of Sedan riding his White Horse into Paris and carrying off Alsace-Lorraine and five billion marks. Aye, it is France again in 1922 riding back into Germany. For centuries these white horses of conquest have been chasing one another across the fields of Europe, from France to Germany, from Germany to France and back again. When will the world learn that the might of the Conqueror never brings "peace on earth," never settles anything?

A *Red Horse* follows the white. It is the logic of history. One follows the other as a natural sequence. Read the pages of history trampled by horses' hoofs. Look out over your own world. The red of war and bitter hate always follows on the heels of conquest. The might of conquering imperialism has never won a lasting peace. It never can. It merely paves the way for "another day." You may ride the White Horse of Conquest to-day, but the Red Horse of War will overtake you to-morrow. Napoleon rides his white horse into Germany in 1806, and in 1870 Bismarck rides a red horse back into France. Fifty-two years later, Field Marshal Foch follows Bismarck back into Germany. Ask the statesmen of France why they send their armies into the Ruhr, and they will tell you they do so because they fear lest if the might of Germany be not crushed, even annihilated, the Teutonic conqueror will some day march again into Paris. Is it not perfectly clear that unless Europe has a change of heart and finds some better policy than that which France is now following, the downtrodden masses of the continent will continue at the mercy of white and red horses for unknown generations to come?

A *Black Horse,* the black of famine and despair inevitably tramps on the heels of the Red Horse. The rider is a Food Dictator, says Whitwell Wilson, with a pair of balances in his hand. Peoples are rationed, prices mount upward, wheat rises to eight times its normal cost. The Government issues orders, "Waste neither oil, nor wine, nor sugar, nor bread." Does that sound very modern? It was very old in John's day. Prices were fixed, food was rationed and black famine stared people in the face at the siege of Nineveh, at the siege of Samaria, and of Jerusalem, and of Rome. It has been the same in every great siege from that day until our own day when the world was in a state of siege for four and one-half years. The next great war — how glibly men talk about it! — may mean universal famine, the whole world riding a black horse.

The fourth is a *Pale Horse.* The White Horse of Conquest is followed by the Red Horse of War, the Red Horse of War is followed by the Black Horse of Famine, and never do these three travel the highway alone. A fourth horse inevitably follows, the Pale Horse of Pestilence and Death. It is the final curse that war and conquest always loose from the bottomless pit. When has there ever been a great war that was not followed by a "black plague," whether of typhus, or cholera, or influenza? Science may some day conquer the danger of pestilence in a time of war, it can never eliminate the danger of moral plagues. It is five years since the armistice and we are still battling with a universal wave of crime and lust and hate, a pestilential group of post-war curses.

The past decade of the world's history is a tragic commentary on "The Four Horses of the Apocalypse," the first four of the seven seals.

The fifth seal is broken and John sees *an altar.* Look closely and you will discover it is an altar of sacrifice, sprinkled with the blood of the Lamb and the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. Underneath the altar John sees the souls of them that had suffered and died for their testimony. Their blood cried to heaven like the blood of righteous Abel.

The persecuted disciples could hardly reconcile their fearful sufferings with the love of God and the God of love. It is not strange that many sought to escape their tormentors by renouncing their faith. Let me quote from the history of early Christianity: "No limits were set to the persecution. Some were thrown into dungeons to renounce their faith or die in agony. Long trains of those who escaped or survived imprisonment were sent across the country or beyond the sea to labor like brutes in government mines. (It reads like the history of modern Belgium.) In many cities the streets must have been literally blocked with stakes and scaffolds where death was dealt alike to men, women and little children. It mattered nothing of what rank the victims were. The poorest slave and the first officer of the imperial treasury were massacred with equal savageness. The memory of man embraces no such strife, in which there was but one side armed, but one side slain." John had lived through a century that was made hideous by the names of Caligula, Nero, and Domitian, three names that would have transformed any century into a hideous night; and Trajan

and Diocletian and other beasts were still to come from the bottomless pit to drive their four horses roughshod over the innocent. No wonder Christians cried, "Where is God? Does He know, does He care? Why does He not interfere?"

When the fifth seal was opened John heard the cry of the living echoed among the dead. The blood of the martyrs cried out, "How long, O Master, holy and true, dost thou not avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" It is not a mere cry for revenge. No such cry is heard in heaven. But how long would it be until a righteous God would balance the scales of justice? In reply, the martyrs were given white robes and told not to be disquieted or impatient, to rest "a little time," that God would yet have His way on earth through the conquering Christ. It would only be a "little time," though it were a thousand years or two thousand years or three thousand years. What of that? "A thousand years are but as yesterday when it is past and as a watch in the night." God would not forget their tears. Wrongs would be righted. The scales would be balanced. Firm stands the throne of eternal justice.

O, you statesmen and imperial rulers who sit in the saddle and hold the bridle reins of the Four Horses of the Apocalypse, remember that the dead you trample underfoot, the unborn babes, the shattered children, the ruined maidens, the dead fathers, the maddened mothers, all have a voice. Though that voice be not heard in your council chambers, it is heard in heaven, and in the end heaven will have the last word. Five years ago when the victors were gathering at Versailles,

Edgar A. Guest translated the "fifth seal" perfectly in a poem entitled "At the Peace Table."

"Who shall sit at the table, then, when the terms of peace are made —
The wisest men of the troubled lands in their silver and gold brocade?
Yes, they shall gather in solemn state to speak for each living race,
But, who shall speak for the unseen dead that shall come to the council place?

"Though you see them not and you hear them not, they shall sit at the table, too;
They shall throng the room where the peace is made and know what it is you do;
The innocent dead from the sea shall rise to stand at the wise man's side
And over his shoulder a boy shall look — a boy that they crucified.

"You may guard the doors of that council hall with barriers strong and stout,
But the dead unbidden shall enter there, and never you'll shut them out.
And the man that died in the open boat, and the babes that suffered worse,
Shall sit at the table when peace is made by the side of a martyred nurse.

"You may see them not, but they'll all be there; when they speak you may fail to hear;
You may think that you're making your pacts alone, but their spirits will hover near,
And whatever the terms of the peace you make with the tyrant whose hands are red,
You must please not only the living here, but must satisfy your dead." [1]

[1] From "The Path to Home," by Edgar A. Guest. Reprinted by permission of Reilly & Lee, Publishers, Chicago.

VI

THE REDEEMED IN HEAVEN

REVELATION 6:12–7:17

AFTER *these things I saw, and behold, a great multitude, which no man could number, out of every nation, and of all tribes and peoples and tongues, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, arrayed in white robes and palms in their hands; and they cry with a great voice, saying, Salvation unto our God which sitteth on the throne, and unto the Lamb.* Rev. 7:9, 10.

VI

THE REDEEMED IN HEAVEN

REVELATION 6:12–7:17

CONQUEST and war, famine and pestilence, destruction and death are things that bulk large in the world's history. Christians must be prepared for such calamities, must learn to live undismayed in their presence and bravely struggle through them, remembering there is a power over all that makes for righteousness. This is the lesson John teaches or implies in the breaking of the first five seals of God's mystery book.

The sixth seal is broken and John sees in vision such a display of divine power as to cause believers to wonder and unbelievers to stagger. There is an earthquake, an eruption of nature that shakes not merely the boot of Italy nor the Island of Sicily, not merely Japan or the Pacific coast, but convulses the whole world of nature. The sun goes into total eclipse, the moon becomes red like blood, stars fall from their sockets and the heavens are rolled up like a scroll. The vision implies that God would visit this earth with judgments so terrible and universal that kings, crown princes and field marshals, the rich and the strong, all bondmen and free men, would hide in caves and cry to the mountains and rocks to cover them from the wrath of the Lamb, from the wrath of outraged love and gentleness. The picture is so dark and dismal

that many have leaped to it as a prophecy of the last days. If so, then the breaking of the seventh seal should result in the Holy City, New Jerusalem, the final goal of Christian history, as well as the climax of John's Vision.

The seventh seal, however, does not so result. Instead, it ushers in seven more woes and judgments. We take it, therefore, that the sixth seal refers to one of those numerous judgment days that fill many a page of history. The contents of this seal have been realized in one way or another in every great crisis of history. Such a judgment was that which fell on the Kingdom of Judah in Isaiah's day. It was realized again at the destruction of Jerusalem in Titus' day, and at the fall of Rome in Vandal days. The judgment of the sixth seal fell upon Europe during the Napoleonic wars, and it fell again upon the entire world in these latter days of Kaisers, Czars and Emperors. There are men and women living to-day who can tell you precisely what the figurative terms of the sixth seal mean. Ask the boys who lived through those thunderous days and shrieking nights on Flanders' fields whether the sun became black as sackcloth and the moon as blood. Ask the mothers and fathers of England who lived through those fearsome days when all the institutions of civilization were transformed into one vast war machine. Ask the mothers of starving babies in Austria and in Germany to-day whether the language of this sixth seal is over-drawn or whether it means anything. There are many social earthquakes and world cataclysms in the drama of history, and each is a judgment day of God.

When we leave the sixth chapter with its rumbling of horses' hoofs and its earthquake shocks and step into the seventh chapter, we pass abruptly from the region of clouds and storms into the land of calm and sunshine. John is in heaven and is looking down to earth, which is spread beneath him like a map stretching from the Euphrates to the Tiber. At the four corners of the earth, north, east, south and west, he sees four angels who control the winds of wrath and the hurricanes of trouble. A fifth angel mounts up the eastern dome of the sky vault until he is high enough to be seen and heard by the other four. The fifth angel cries, " Hold back the storms and the cyclones, let no more hot winds of judgment blow until we have assembled and sealed the servants of God." John looks and sees an immense throng of the redeemed gathering in heaven. It is a vision of victory, revealing the safety of God's people in the midst of trial and tribulation. If all this imagery means little or nothing to us, remember it meant a very great deal to the tried saints of John's day who could not understand why they suffered, and were tempted to say, " It is a vain thing to serve the Lord."

The seventh chapter is a restful pause in the drama. It is an interlude between the sixth and seventh seals. John is not only an inspired seer, he is an artist in the use of his pen. He knows the value of quick contrasts. Light and shadows alternate throughout the book. The heaviest acts of the drama are interspersed with ravishing scenes and thrilling songs. The whole movement of the Apocalypse reveals the psychology of a finished literary product. It never overtaxes one

set of emotions. The writer knows when the tension should be relieved and where the restful scene and cheering song should occur. So here, having described the dark things of the six seals, and before he opens the seventh with its trumpets and thunder, he pauses for a vision of glory land. Dr. James Hastings logically groups the contents of this passage around three main ideas:

I. *The Number of the Redeemed.* A disciple once asked Jesus, "Lord, are there few that be saved?" The seventh chapter of Revelation is an answer to that question. Sixty years after the question was asked, John sees a great multitude of redeemed which no man could number. From the blood-stained fields of Israel came one hundred and forty-four thousand, twelve thousand from each tribe. No one, of course, believes that this figure is the literal count of those saved under the old covenant. It is another instance of the symbolism of numbers. He sees also an innumerable throng from the Gentile world gathered from "every nation and tribe and tongue and people." The vision represents John's conviction that the gospel would be universally triumphant, a conviction that rested partly on faith and partly on knowledge. I say partly on knowledge. The Seer had had a long experience. He knew some things by sight as well as by faith. Living until the close of the first century, he had witnessed the power of the Gospel to plough its way through all opposition. In view of the apparent weakness of the church and the titanic forces with which she grappled, her very continuance during those early years is one of the marvels of history. She not

only "held her own," she grew and expanded in a remarkable way. Contemporary writers like Pliny and Tacitus, bear testimony to the aggressiveness of Christianity in that period. Relatively the triumphs of the church in the first century have seldom, if ever, been equalled. It was a personal knowledge of, and a long experience with early Christianity that made the vision of "a great multitude" possible and actual.

The vision also reflects John's faith. Whatever others may have believed and however many may have renounced Christ under the stress of persecution, John believed in the stability of the church and in the future of Christianity. He knew that the grain of mustard seed which Jesus planted would become a vast universal growth, in the shadow of which uncounted millions would gather. I have read somewhere that Daniel Webster was one day riding across the western plains with a friend and frontiersman. As they rode over vast stretches of unoccupied country, Webster suddenly paused and with head lowered seemed to be listening attentively. His friend was curious to know what he was doing. He answered, "I am listening to the tramp of the coming millions." It was the expression of a statesman's faith in the future of his country. He saw as in vision a vast empire occupied by immense cities and teeming populations. So John saw in vision the uncounted millions swinging into the empire of Christ, and heard the shouts of triumph echoing down the future. He knew the days were coming when uncounted multitudes from the north, east, south and west would sit down in the Kingdom

of Christ, and he wanted his readers to feel the inspiration that he felt as he contemplated the future.

II. *The Variety of the Redeemed.* They were gathered from every nation and tribe and tongue and people. So Jesus said, "I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me." "All men" is all inclusive. It was not merely the redeemed of Israel that John saw gathering about the Lamb. Not only are the white races capable of being drawn, the black races and the yellow races will be there too. Eighteen hundred years ago the Seer of Patmos believed that, saw it clearly, and was a big enough man to preach it. "America for Americans," so be it. But the Kingdom of Christ for all of whatever "border or breed or birth."

What a message in this vision for Christians in John's day and for us now as we push the campaign steadily on through the years! You who are praying "Thy Kingdom come," you who are sacrificing for Christ's sake and sometimes feel discouraged with the winds blowing in your faces, the worldliness of the world, its racial bitterness, its unbelief, its cynicism — oh, lose not heart! Do not let the prayer smother on your lips. Hold not back your gifts. The Kingdom may be slow coming, but come it will. His truth marches on. It must be so. The shepherds of Christ are multiplying in every land. The sheep will be driven into the fold from all the hills and mountains and valleys of the world, from "all nations, and kindreds, and peoples, and tongues."

III. *The Unity of the Redeemed* is seen in three facts. First, they sing a common song in a common language. They no longer chant in Latin, sing in

Greek and chorus in Hebrew. The book of praise is not a Baptist book, nor a Methodist Hymnal, nor a Presbyterian Hymnal, nor a United Presbyterian Psalter. In the church militant we sing different songs; in the Church triumphant they sing the same song. John could not conceive of anyone in heaven not singing. Angels and elders, the four living creatures, an innumerable company of redeemed — all are singing. Listen to the song they sing:

" Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. Blessing and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. *Amen.*"

Some of you do not sing a great deal in church. At least, your lips are never seen to move, and we cannot hear your voice. That is too bad. You will sing in heaven, of course. You couldn't stay there if you did not.

Again, they wear a common robe. They are all arrayed in white. Once they wore the " filthy rags " of their own righteousness; now they are clothed upon with the righteousness of Christ. As the battle-scarred veterans of the " sixties " returning from war, passed in review before the President, so John saw this white-robed army pass in review before the throne of God. One of the elders came to John as he stood enraptured, and said, " What are these which are arrayed in white robes, and whence came they? " The seer shaded his eyes and looked, but failed to recognize that uniform of white. He had never seen the like of it. He had been familiar with the black of mourning, the drab of sin, and the purple of royalty; he had seen the gold

and silver braid and jeweled decorations which distinguished the elect few from the forgotten mass, " but here was a new order of chivalry, — The Order of the Pure in Heart, who see God." Not always had their robes been white. So John had to confess, " I do not know who they are; thou knowest." The angel answered, " These are they that have come up out of great tribulation and have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." They had been victims of trials and troubles, pain and persecution, but having endured to the end and having overcome by the blood of the Lamb, they are now beyond the veil celebrating the festival of victory. What a miracle of grace!

Finally, they enjoy a common security. It is said of " Bobby " Burns " that he could never read the closing verses of this chapter without tears." Poor " Bobby," his garments so soiled with sin, his soul buffeted with the winds of passion, but deep down in his heart hungry for soul whiteness, praying for moral victory, bathing his face in tears as he read:

" Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

" They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat.

" For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them into living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

We begin now to understand the mystery of the

sealed book. Do you get an inkling from this chapter why God permits Christians to suffer? The "great tribulation" is the seed time, the "great multitude" is the white harvest. "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." There is no trouble that Christ cannot solve. Life has no temptation that Christ cannot conquer. Time has no pain or disappointment or heartache that Eternity will not assuage. There are occasions in life when the great passages of Revelation cannot be read without moist eyes and quickening pulse.

Not long ago I was visiting some friends at their country home. We were sitting on the veranda. Beneath us a valley stretched away to a hill beyond, on which stood a group of clean white farm buildings, house, barn and out-sheds. God save these typical farm homes! They have been the saviors of America. Our host, pointing across the valley, said, "Do you see those buildings yonder on the hill? Well, that is where Dr. and Mrs. ——— are making their present home with her parents." I knew them, they were young people, these two, she a beautiful young woman and he one of God's noblemen, thoroughly equipped for service. A little more than three years they had been married, and a little less than three years they had worked together, physician and wife, in the foreign field. But trouble came, real trouble. His health failed and he was invalided home. They came bearing a child in their arms. Placing their tender charge in the care of grandparents, the young father and mother hurried on in their race against death. The day we sat there on the veranda they were both in the hospital,

one battling for his life, the other undergoing a serious operation. How suddenly the storm broke into their young lives, sweeping away almost everything they held precious. The sun was eclipsed, the moon was darkened, the stars of hope fell from their sky. All their ambitions came crashing to earth, leaving them a cheerless present and an uncertain future. My friend, go to their home, go to the hospital there, sit down by the sick bed and open your Bible at the seventh chapter of Revelation, and read: "Therefore are they before the throne of God, and they serve Him day and night in His temple; He that sitteth upon the throne shall spread his tabernacle over them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more, neither shall the sun strike upon them, nor any heat, . . . and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Will they hear you? Aye, will they? Their hearts will throb, the light will kindle in their eyes, hope will be born anew. The chapter was written for such as they. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." Forget this sermon. Close the chapter for the present. It will come to you again. When it does, you will listen to it eagerly. Against the day of your trouble it will sing its song of hope, and your soul will leap to its notes of victory: "Earth has no sorrow that heaven can not heal."

VII

A BLARE OF TRUMPETS

REVELATION 8:1–9:21

AND *when he opened the seventh seal, there followed a silence in heaven about the space of half an hour. And I saw the seven angels which stand before God; and there were given unto them seven trumpets.* Rev. 8:1, 2.

VII

A BLARE OF TRUMPETS

REVELATION 8:1–9:21

WHEN the seventh seal was opened a deep silence fell on heaven which lasted about thirty minutes. Heaven waited in suspense, probably anticipating that the seventh seal would announce the dawn of the Golden Age, the final victory of Christ. Instead of a millennium of righteousness and peace, we are greeted with a blare of seven trumpets and are again looking down on a storm-swept earth and following once more the troubled course of human history.

One feels as though he were attempting the impossible to try to say anything helpful or even intelligible on the highly figurative events introduced by the seven trumpets. It is important, I think, that we hold steadily before us the fact that John was all the time trying to comfort and encourage tried Christians who needed nothing so much as a vision of God's omnipotence, a sense of their own security and the assurance of ultimate victory.

Before John tells his readers of the things that must yet come to pass, he assures them that their prayers are not in vain; though they seem to bear no immediate fruit, their prayers are not futile. That they

have a direct bearing on divine judgments is set forth in the scene portrayed in the third and fifth verses. An angel stands at the altar burning incense. The incense mingles with the prayers of the saints; heaven and earth are joined in common intercession. Immediately the coals from the altar fall into the censer, which the angel empties upon the earth, resulting in storms and earthquakes and fearful judgments.

You will remember in connection with the fifth seal how the souls of the martyrs from beneath the altar of sacrifice cried to heaven, "How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" John imagines he hears in heaven the echo of the cry of troubled Christians here on earth. What he is saying in this scene, which is a prelude to the seven trumpets, is this, "Your prayers ascending to heaven like incense will yet release the coals of divine judgment. God is not unmindful of your needs. He will answer your prayers."

The seven trumpets ushered in seven different events. Six of them are uncanny things, dreadful plagues, each succeeding one worse than the former. Do these seven trumpet visions represent particular persons and events, or shall we take them as descriptive of the general course of history? We think the latter is the true interpretation. Many have attempted to find in the pages of history concrete events and particular persons corresponding to each of the seven visions. The result has been utter confusion. There is a total lack of agreement. Let us see for ourselves:

I. When the first angel blows his trumpet, hail stones

and fire balls fall to earth amid a downpour of blood. The seer doubtless had in mind the plagues that fell on Egypt. Many of the details of his Vision are borrowed from that source. One writer declares that this first "trumpet" refers to the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the Jewish nation by the Romans in the year 70. He rightly interprets that event as God's judgment upon a nation which first set itself in opposition to the Gospel. But how does he know that the first trumpet was literally fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem? It is just as applicable to any one of a great many historic judgments. How about the World War with its hail of shells, its hell of fire and flow of blood? What John probably wants his readers to understand is that such things would come to pass before history was completed. Note, if you will, that only a third part of life was destroyed. God remembers mercy. "He will not utterly destroy."

II. The second angel blows, and a volcanic mountain flaming and smoking in full eruption is cast into the sea. It is a vision of falling empires. In the fifty-first chapter of Jeremiah, the prophet utters a similar prophecy, "I am against thee, O destroying mountain, and I will roll thee down from the rocks and make thee a burnt mountain." Jeremiah was speaking of Babylon, and doubtless John had Rome in mind. What Mount Etna is to the Island of Sicily — an object of awe and terror — that was Babylon, and Egypt, and Rome, to the ancient world. We are assured by the seer that all such empires will be uprooted and submerged beneath the tidal movements of the Kingdom of God. Just as a burning mountain cast into the sea

would make a dreadful commotion and be fearfully destructive of life, so when a great empire falls the inevitable result is general disruption of organized life, social anarchy and chaos. Civilization was a long time regaining its balance after the fall of the Roman Empire. It was the same when the empire of Louis XVI collapsed. Commerce and industry, civil authority, property rights, the church, religion, everything essential to civilization went down in a delirium of social madness. The "Reign of Terror" was inevitable. Even now the present generation of Europe is learning by bitter experience that a great mountain, like Germany, in eruption cannot be sunk in the sea of international life without causing a convulsion of civilization. For ten years we have been hearing the echoes of the second trumpet in the news columns of our daily papers.

III. The third angel blows and a meteor is seen falling with a burning trail of fire. Its name is "Wormwood." That this falling star refers to nothing else but a false, apostate religion, is accepted by almost every writer I have consulted. Many of them are at great pains to identify it with some particular false teacher or doctrine or system that has poisoned like wormwood, the very fountains of religious life. It has been variously interpreted as referring to Gnosticism, Manichaeism, Mohammedanism, Arminianism, Mormonism, and even Christian Science. Protestants are prone to think of the star as Romanism. I doubt not Romanists are glad to return the compliment. Quite likely many "fundamentalists" would agree to the theory that certain present-day teachers and

preachers of the more liberal school are at least in the trail of that falling meteor. Why should we insist upon confining this trumpet vision to any particular person or system? Lick Observatory on Mt. Hamilton reveals three hundred thousand stars. The telescope of our national religious census reveals a great many types of faith and a great variety of religious systems, Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical, Unitarian and Jewish Churches, Christian Science, Theosophy, ethical societies, and what not. Dr. James Freeman Clark has written two masterful volumes on "The Ten Great Religions" of the world. I do not know how many lesser stars and satellites there may be in addition to these main bodies. I feel, therefore, like a certain English writer: "Not being a theological astronomer, I am unable amid such a multitude, to identify" the falling star of Revelation, the system of heavenly bodies is so immense. "What I clearly see is this — that as that star fell from heaven, so in heaven it should have remained." When religion falls from its heavenly sphere and becomes of the earth earthy, it works havoc with the souls of men, causing the very streams of life to become bitter as wormwood.

IV. The fourth trumpet results in the eclipse of the sun and the darkening of the moon and stars. It is a reference to calamities that would obscure the light of heaven and cause the world to grope its way amid thick shadows. The church must be prepared to weather such periods in her history. As a matter of fact, she did weather such times of partial eclipse of her faith during the dark ages when, as a result of papal abuse and misuse of the means of religion, the

masses perished for want of the light of life. The Bible was eclipsed, the church was under a shadow, Christ was hidden, the stars of truth were darkened. But the church did not perish. The true body of Christ lived on. Always there was a faithful remnant, whether Catholic or Protestant, that kept the torch of truth burning and the light of faith shining. It will always be so, come what may.

V. The fifth trumpet is a vision of another star fallen to earth. The star is a person, in Hebrew "Abaddon," in Greek "Apollyon," the destroyer. He holds the key to the bottomless pit. When he lifts the lid there issues forth a swarm of locusts that becloud the earth like smoke. They have bodies like horses, faces like men, the hair of women, the teeth of lions, crowns of gold, breastplates of iron, and the tails of scorpions. They are commanded not to kill, only to torment those who have not the seal of God. The life of these pests is limited to five months, that is, they are permitted to afflict men for a limited, unknown period.

Here again those who insist on interpreting the Vision of St. John as though it were a scientific treatise have sought to identify Apollyon and his locusts with some particular person or movement in history. Some think that Apollyon is Mohomet and the locusts his Saracen hordes. Others are quite certain that the Destroyer is the Pope and the locusts his monks and priests. Why not leave it stand as it is, a picture of some short-lived destroying force or influence whose agents, thick as locusts, fearful as lions, intelligent as men, wily as women, malicious as scorpions, cause a

state of misery and disorder in which death is preferable to life?

More than once in history has some Apollyon lifted the lid of the bottomless pit and turned loose a swarm of destroying locusts to torment man like scorpions. It was so in France when Marat, Robespierre and Danton took charge of the National Assembly. Behind them was the Commune, behind the Commune was the irresponsible mob. In their ill-starred efforts to reconstruct the state and to destroy the church, the leaders opened the sluice gates of human passion. The surging flood immediately swept beyond their control. Never in the history of papal persecutions, not even on St. Bartholomew's day, were more revolting scenes enacted than those that smeared France with blood in the last decade of the Eighteenth century. The carnival of blood began with the ruthless massacre of thirty priests on the second day of September, 1792, and before it ended convents and monasteries, abbeys and churches were turned into slaughter pens; aristocrats and paupers, noblemen and criminals, old and young, ministering priests and praying nuns, women of high estate and low, anyone, everyone who happened in the way went down in that grand holocaust of slaughter. Life and property belonged to any who wanted to take them. The very language of the fifth trumpet vision is suggested by H. A. Taine in his "The French Revolution": "All the unfettered instincts that live in the lowest depths of the heart, started from the abyss at once, not only the heinous instincts with their fangs, but likewise the foulest with their slaver." It was judgment day for France, a fearful blast of the

fifth trumpet. It was not the first time that trumpet blew, nor the last. It may blow again, it will when society ripens for judgment.

VI. The sixth trumpeter is commanded to "Loose the four angels which are bound at the great River Euphrates." Immediately we see an army sweeping across the field, twice ten thousand times ten thousand, equipped to kill and to conquer. From the nostrils of the horses issue fire and smoke and brimstone.

We are on perplexing ground here. The exegetical road is none too certain. When Whitsell Wilson had written his companion volumes, "The Christ We Forget" and "The Church We Forget," he one day met a friend and told him that he was about to write a third volume on the Apocalypse. His friend answered cheerfully, "Well, your troubles will begin on the River Euphrates," meaning, of course, that the author would be hard put for an explanation at this point. Indeed, a good many people, not only in our own day, but more particularly in ancient days, found their troubles beginning on the banks of the Euphrates.

The Euphrates was the eastern boundary of the kingdom of Israel in prophetic days, and it was the eastern boundary of the Roman Empire in John's day. From the Euphrates came the Assyrians in Amos' day and in Hosea's day, the Babylonians in Isaiah's and Jeremiah's day, the Persians in Esther's day, the Parthians in John's day, and the Turks and Tartars in a later day. All these hordes at different periods broke loose from the Euphrates to work havoc on civilization. Even as John wrote Rome was casting anxious eyes toward her eastern boundary. She was expecting

trouble from that region, just as on more than one occasion we have anticipated trouble along the Rio Grande, though on a smaller scale. So for generations France has kept an anxious eye on the Rhine, and the Balkan States have watched the regions of the Dnieper. It would seem entirely natural that the seer should seek to impress his readers with the instability of the persecuting Roman Empire by calling attention to a political situation charged with danger. I cannot find any other meaning in the sixth trumpet that seems reasonable or that fits in better with the general purpose of the book.

In conclusion let us recognize that these trumpet visions have been marked features of the course of Christian history. Storms of passion, wrecking cyclones, volcanoes of evil, earthquakes and social convulsions — why, the earth has never been entirely free from such calamities. Mankind has always suffered the natural consequences of sin, and the natural consequences are the fearful judgments of God. What have been the historic results of these judgments? I mean the moral and religious reactions? What are they to-day? Just what they always have been, just what John says and what all history teaches. "Men repent not of their works." They continue to worship demons and hug their idols of gold and silver. Tell me, in moral and spiritual terms, what has been the total result of the cyclone that swept our own generation in the World War? Have the nations brought forth fruit meet for repentance? He would be an optimist indeed who could think so. The world continues in the grip of superstition, crime, bitterness and

mutual hatreds. Nations are still crying for their pounds of flesh. We still worship the idol of nationalism; we will not learn. So it was in John's day, so it has been in every day. God's spirit will not always plead with men. The days of reckoning will come, as they have always come. When lightning crashes and judgment rolls, men and nations, steeped in sin, apparently lose all capacity for repentance.

What is to become of the church, the Bride of the Lamb, in this storm-swept field of history? Well, read on, read on. The Vision is not completed. The church is not forgotten. God keeps watch above His own. We shall yet sing the victory song, " The Kingdom of this world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ."

VIII

THE ABIDING WORD

REVELATION 10:1–11

AND *the voice which I heard from heaven, I heard it again speaking with me, and saying, Go, take the book which is open in the hand of the angel that standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. . . . And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up. . . . And they say unto me, Thou must prophesy again over many peoples and nations and tongues and kings.* Rev. 10:8, 10, 11.

VIII

THE ABIDING WORD

REVELATION 10:1–11

AFTER a month's absence we come back once more to our study of Revelation. My own hope and desire is that time may now permit, and that circumstances may not interfere with, our continued journey through this strange book. In again picking up the thread of the narrative let us keep clearly in mind that the purpose of the book is to give comfort and courage to a generation of Christians undergoing fearful persecution. The one absorbing theme of the book is the ultimate triumph of the Kingdom of Christ over all opposition. The writer is all the time trying to put courage into his readers by making them conscious of the living Christ and perfectly sure of the ultimate triumph of His Kingdom. Its chapters abound with promises to those who overcome, who endure to the end. The book is not merely a history of the past, nor a detailed description of the future. It is a superview of life, a prospectus of the years as seen from heaven. It mirrors events, epochs, principles, and describes in symbolic language the development of the Kingdom of God in its relation to the kingdom of the world.

The first three chapters are almost entirely taken up with the letters to the seven churches. The fourth

chapter is a vision of the throne of power. Chapters five and eleven inclusive, deal with the book of mystery that contained the seven-fold secret of God's plans and purposes. The seals were broken and the contents revealed by the Lamb, who was worthy to open the book, having suffered and died to overcome. The first four seals reveal the four horses of the Apocalypse. Under the fifth we hear the souls of martyrs crying to heaven for vindication. The sixth results in an earthquake, a convulsion that shakes life to its foundation, like the smashing events of 1914–1918. When the seventh seal is opened we are listening to a blare of seven trumpets. They are in a sense a prospectus of the years with their inevitable wars, sieges, falling empires, religious infidelities and periods of darkness, all of which the church would have to weather for unknown ages to come.

The first six of these trumpets were discussed in our last lecture. Before we come to the seventh with its heart-stirring, soul-thrilling note of victory, we are halted in our march through events to glance at two abiding things, two powerful agencies that were necessary to the coming of the kingdom, the Abiding Word in the tenth chapter and the Abiding Church in the eleventh.

The Revelation is a drama, not to be acted but to be imagined. The scenic setting of the tenth chapter is striking, the imagery is extravagant. In the foreground stands a mighty angel, bearing a striking resemblance to the Christ portrayed in the first chapter. There Christ is clothed with a garment down to His feet, His voice is like the sound of Niagara, His coun-

tenance as the sun, His feet like burnished brass. Here the Angel is arrayed in a cloud, turbaned with a rainbow, His feet like pillars of fire and His face as the sun. The Mighty Angel is none other than Christ Himself. John sees Him as a great spiritual presence with an international aspect. He stands with one foot on the high seas and the other on the continent. No land could contain Him, no nation could claim Him, no sea could obstruct His movements. He occupies a position of world dominion. Mark now, the Angel delivers to John three things:

I. *A Secret Message.* With a voice that echoed like thunder the angel spoke. John was about to write down what the voice said when the angel interrupted, saying, "No, John, write it not. Let it remain a secret for the present." What was that secret message? I do not know. If the truth were told, maybe John didn't know. If he knew, he could not find words to express it. It is the author's way of stating a fact with which we are all more or less familiar. However much of God's love and secret purpose may be revealed in Christ, whatever light may be thrown on the mystery of life and the meaning of suffering through the incarnation and passion of Christ, there are things in the secret councils of eternity that we cannot now know. There are depths in the ocean that have never been fathomed, there are Alpine heights that are seldom scaled, mysteries that are never solved. There are hidden secrets in the mind of God that can not be revealed. "Now are we the sons of God, it doth not yet appear what we shall be." "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." The

things that God hath prepared for them that love Him, "eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive." What man or family or nation does not have its secret?

Let me have your attention for a moment to an illustration which may at first seem far afield. In 1901 England and the United States entered into the Hay-Pauncefote Treaty for the building of the Panama Canal. The Canal was to be free and open to vessels of all nations without discrimination. In 1912 Congress passed the Canal Act, which exempted American coastwise shipping from toll. In 1914 President Wilson went before Congress and, "for the sake of our national honor as a treaty-keeping nation," asked for a repeal of the clause that gave preferential treatment to a certain class of American ships. In presenting the matter to Congress he said, "I ask this of you in support of the foreign policy of the administration. I shall not know how to deal with other matters of even greater delicacy and nearer consequence, if you do not grant it to me in ungrudging measure." There was in the statement a mysterious suggestion of something the administration could not reveal. It aroused the keenest curiosity. Newspapers turned the matter over and over without obtaining any clue. To the present day that sentence in the President's message remains unexplained. It was a mystery then, and is still a mystery. Nevertheless, Congress with an overwhelming majority accepted the President's statement trustfully, blindly, and granted the legislation requested.

It is an immense and a delicate task that any govern-

ment has to perform in this day when the world is just a vast whispering gallery, when every word spoken by any responsible person echoes throughout the world with the speed of light. While America has always deplored European methods of secret diplomacy, we can readily understand that to conduct cabinet meetings on street corners and in hotel lobbies would not be in the interest of a sane diplomacy. Here is my point: God's task as the Ruler of the universe, Christ's responsibility as the King of Kings, is infinitely more delicate and complex than that of any earthly ruler. What John hints in this chapter is that Christians must trust God blindly, if necessary. They must be content if some things in God's mystery book remain a secret on this side of the veil. John perceived that there were some pages of the sealed book that even Christ would not reveal, and neither John nor any other would be permitted to disclose. Some things must wait for the revealing light of eternity. Maybe some of you here this morning need to take that truth to heart, and learn to say, "Though He slay me, yet will I trust Him."

II. *A Written Message.* The angel held in his hand "a little book." Unlike the book with the seven seals, this was an open book. What does that little book represent? Let us look closely. John is instructed to take the book from the angel's hand and to eat it. He is told frankly that it would be sweet to his taste but bitter in his experience. The content of the little book was to be the substance of a prophetic message which he is to proclaim to many peoples. It is intended for world diffusion and would have a world value. We

know of only one Book that meets these conditions, the Book of the Gospel of Christ. Six years before John had written his gospel, and years before that, Matthew, Mark and Luke had each in turn committed their memoirs to writing. To John, therefore, the "little book" doubtless represented that gospel record. To us it stands for the full gospel, the entire Word of God revealed in and through Jesus Christ.

In taking the book from the angel's hand and eating it, John states a truth in symbolic action. The Gospel of Christ is not only to be read; it must be absorbed and become a part of experience. If we know nothing of how the Gospel, sweet to the taste, becomes bitter in experience, we have probably not assimilated it very thoroughly, nor have we read Christian history discerningly. The Word of God was sweet to Elijah's taste, but it involved bitter experiences for the prophet. Christ's message was sweet to the apostles, but bitter to their experience. How sweet was gospel truth to Stephen's soul, but how bitter it became in his experience! It was bitter to Paul as he met the indifference of the Greek, the antagonism of the Jew and the persecution of the Roman. Ask John the Baptist or John of Patmos or John Wycliffe or John Huss or John Knox about this verse. In all of them the sweetness of truth and the bitterness of experience were strangely mingled. In these relaxing days, not many of us suffer for Christ's sake. We might be better Christians if we suffered more, and doubtless we would suffer more if we were better Christians.

III. *A Commission.* John is told that he would yet have to preach and teach the contents of the little

book to many nations, tongues and peoples. It is Christ's parting command given afresh through the inspired pen of the seer. The author is again setting truth to dramatic action. He wants his readers to understand that the Christian's business, whatever comes, is to be a colporteur of the book, a propagandist for the truth, a herald of the gospel to all nations. Let come what may, nothing is to interfere with that business.

Wendell Phillips stated a deep going principle of Puritan character when he said, " The Puritan did not stop to think; he recognized God in his soul, and acted." It is a searching sentence, and throws a revealing light on our average Christian life in these anti-Puritan days. We probably do not think too much, but we lack in measure the driving passion of God in the soul. We are too cool and calculating in our programs of service. We ask, Will it pay? Is it expedient? What are the chances for success? The question with the early disciples and with all great souls who have left their impress on Christian history, was, Does God require it? Does Christ command it? The problem of world evangelization would have been solved long ago, had we known better how to take our marching orders and had we surrendered more unreservedly to the Christ passion.

What a man of courage was this man John, standing there an exile on Patmos, calmly facing his own day and all future days with their thunder and lightning, their earthquake shocks and social upheavals! Not one sorrow or plague or massacre or pain or dark cloud escaped his ruthless imagination. Nevertheless, he

had the courage of Christ, the courage to see this Mighty Angel striding across oceans and continents, bent on world dominion and destined for it, not because He commands armies and navies but because He embodies in His life and holds in His hand the contents of a "little book." In all the Roman Empire, among all the wise and strong and powerful, there were few if any who comprehended John's idea that a little book would transform history.

What a message John puts in this chapter! It may not be as plain as the column of a newspaper, but it is plain enough to one who reads with discernment. He has told these bewildered Christians that in the unfolding of the Kingdom of God, in the onward movement of the years, there would be wars and famines and pestilences, sieges and falling empires and apostate religions, but the important thing for them, as for John of Patmos and the rest of us, was not "these seven interesting thunders, not the Bolshevism and the Yellow Peril," not the anarchy and disorder, but "a little book" having on its every page the imprint of the hand of God. We are not to glance at it merely. We must eat it, absorb it, assimilate it, get it into our systems, make it a part of our beings. Though it may mean some bitter experiences ere we are through with it or ere it is through with us, insist upon lifting its gleaming message among all nations and peoples. The seventh trumpet can not blow and will not blow, the Kingdom of Christ can not come until the message of the "little book" is heralded to all tribes and kindreds and tongues.

I close with a sentence uttered twelve years ago by

Theodore Roosevelt in an address at the University of California in connection with the Ter-centennial of the King James Version, "*I enter a most earnest plea that in our hurried and rather bustling life of to-day we do not lose the hold that our forefathers had on the Bible.*"

17,096

IX

VOICES OF VICTORY

REVELATION 11:1–18

AND *the seventh angel sounded; and there followed great voices in heaven, and they said, The kingdom of the world is become the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever.* Rev. 11:15.

IX

VOICES OF VICTORY

REVELATION 11:1–18

THE church to-day is a powerful institution. It is easy to believe that the gates of hell shall not prevail against her. She is strong in membership, her right to life and property is secure; she is wealthy, enjoys prestige, and has commanding influence. But transport yourself in imagination back to John's day, and how would you feel about it? With a membership comparatively small, faith wavering, life and property insecure, influence negligible, she was the object of universal hate and contempt. Little congregations scattered here and there over the world "flickered like candles in a blustery night." Who could tell whether the church would survive the day of her weakness? One man at least was sure of her survival; one man was certain of final victory. With the eyes of a prophet he saw down the years, and with ears tuned to the future he heard voices of victory. That man was John of Patmos. In the chapter immediately preceding, he was considering the part "a little book" would play in transforming history. He is here talking about the church, immovable and indestructible. The chapter sets forth in the main three ideas, (1) the Security of the Church, (2) the Persistency of Her Witness, (3) the Certainty of Her Victory.

I. *The Security of Believers,* suggested in the action of the first two verses, is one of those old doctrines which the church fathers used to discuss with animation. It has quite disappeared from the doctrinal vocabulary of the present-day church, and we are none the better for the loss. John is told to take a line and measure the temple of God, the altar and the worshipers. The outer court, which is trodden by the Gentiles, is not to be included. Of course, the writer is not thinking of the temple at Jerusalem which had been destroyed thirty years earlier. What he has in mind is the Christian church, the dwelling place of God, the altar of prayer, the assembly of worshipers, the home of God's people. John is told to measure not the church entire, only the inner church composed of the true Israel of God. The outer portions of the sanctuary, including those who were mere nominal Christians, were to be omitted from the measurement.

For the first time John draws a line of distinction between true members of the church and mere professing members. When he draws his measuring line around that inner company of true believers, he intends to convey to his readers the idea that there is a ring of gold, a circle of protecting fire, around those who are genuinely Christ's. God measures what to Him is precious. He keeps watch above His own. But the promise of divine security does not extend to all who may tread the sacred courts. Remember that, O Church of Pergamos, where some hold the doctrine of Balaam and of the Nicolaitanes. Remember that, O Thyatira, tolerating Jezebel and her followers.

And Sardis, with your unfulfilled works; and Laodicea, neither cold nor hot. In all those churches there were faithful souls who were ever within God's tender care, but not every one who said, " Lord, Lord " could claim the promise. Worldliness had made its mark upon some. Others were wavering because of persecution. Many of them had never been more than nominal Christians. All such were Gentiles, unregenerate. They were allowed to tread the outer courts of the church, to remain in it, though not a part of it, for a period of forty-two months, three and one-half years. The figure is a broken number, a bisected seven, the half of the perfect number. It is generally regarded as a symbol of an unknown period of time. Some day, after a while, the true sons of God will be revealed, but for the present they must be content with the promise of security.

There are certain aspects of the church that do not change. In one respect the church to-day is just what it was in John's day and has been in every day. It has many good Christians, some indifferent Christians and some who are genuinely bad. Remember, however, the period of " three and one-half years " is not closed. Until the end of the present dispensation the tares must remain with the wheat, the good must mingle with the bad. It would require a day of bitter trial and persecution to reveal, " Who's Who " in the church. The message of John's measuring line is this: God knows and will care for His own; nothing shall hurt them. All the promises of God are theirs. They can afford to sing, and only they have a right to sing, " I will fear no evil for Thou art with me. Thy rod

and Thy staff, they comfort me. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

II. From the third verse through the thirteenth, the *Persistent Witness of the Church* is set forth, as usual, in a highly figurative passage. Translated into simple language, it states the fact that the voice of the church can never be silenced. Even in the darkest periods of the church's history, a faithful few will keep the lamp of truth burning. God will never leave Himself without witnesses, and they shall be clothed with power. Like two olive trees, they shall stand feeding the lamp of truth. Like Elijah, the type of all true witnesses in times of religious decline, they shall have power to shut the heavens; like Moses, they shall have power to turn water into blood and to smite the earth with plagues; their words, like Jeremiah's, shall be consuming fire burning up the dross and revealing the gold. It is just a vivid way of saying that those who witness for truth would be imbued with the Eternal Spirit, and would be under God's special care and protection. Until their testimony is finished, nothing could hurt them. So Jesus promised, " Behold I give you authority to tread upon scorpions and serpents, and nothing shall in anywise hurt you."

But *two* witnesses? Why two? Or what two? Do they refer to Moses and Elijah, law and prophecy? Or is John thinking of Joshua and Zerubbabel, civil and religious authority? Are they symbolic of the Old Testament and the New? Or do they represent the word of God and the spirit of God. Some strange views are held, but the strangest of all is that they

represent the two great wings of the present-day church, Protestant and Roman Catholic. It is not a point where one cares to be too dogmatic. Find your own meaning. If it satisfies you, we will not argue. But in our opinion the two witnesses represent none of the foregoing. It seems to us rather another instance of the symbolic use of numbers. Two is a symbol of added strength, of a truth confirmed. So Jesus sent his workers out, two and two. "By the mouth of two witnesses shall every word be confirmed." Let them stand for the witnessing power of a church whose voice can never be permanently silenced until the Kingdom of truth is accomplished.

We are here introduced for the first time to the beast from the bottomless pit. The two witnesses are assaulted and killed, that is, their testimony is silenced. For a period of three and one-half days they remain silent while the world goes merrily on keeping high holiday. It is a short lived triumph, however, for God interposes, to the confusion of the beast and his followers. The witnesses, like our Lord, pass through death to life and resurrection. John knows that the world can never hush the voice of the church. The great persecutions of history would never accomplish their end. Those who die for the faith will rise again in the witness of others. Let the Boxers kill Horace Pitkin, if they will; in three and one-half days, in a little while, there will be ten missionaries witnessing where Pitkin fell. Strike the church as they did at Jerusalem, its scattering sparks will ignite a hundred fires. Silence the church, muffle her voice, in "three and one-half days" the truth crushed to earth will rise

again. Why, it is all cold history written in the warmth of vision and prophecy.

Let me draw from history an illustration in which some one has discovered a remarkable parallel to this passage. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, the papal church seemed everywhere triumphant. Wyclif's voice in England had long since been silenced. John Huss had been burned at the stake; the fires he had ignited in Bohemia were banked. The Waldenses in Southern France had been almost exterminated. In Florence, Savonarola had been hanged and his reformation smothered. The measures of the Inquisition were succeeding with deadly effect. In December, 1513, the dignitaries of the church met in a general council at Rome. Flushed with a sense of triumph, a papal bull was issued summoning all dissenters from papal authority to appear at the next session of the Council in the following May, to show cause for their continued rebellion. When the Council met in May, protests to papal supremacy were called for, but no one responded. Not a voice was heard. Not a man arose to speak for the spirit of revolt that was smouldering in the breasts of men everywhere. One can guess why no such voice was heard in court that day. To be unwittingly caught in a trap is one thing; to deliberately put your head in a trap is another thing. "Christ's witnesses were silenced; they appeared as dead." Seeing no one accepted the challenge, "the orator of the session," so it is recorded, "ascended the pulpit, and amidst the applause of the assembled Council, uttered this memorable exclamation of triumph — 'There is an end of resistance to the papal

rule and religion; opposers exist no more! The whole body of Christendom is now seen to be subjected to its head.' " The old law of the church that the bodies of heretics should be denied all rites of Christian burial was reaffirmed. So exuberant were the members of the Council that they adjourned to celebrate the universal triumph with a feast " whose splendor had never in Rome been equalled." That was on May 5, 1514. Three and one-half years later, almost to a day, on the 31st of October, 1517, a little stocky monk walked up to his church in Wittenberg and nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the door. They were ninety-five protests to papal abuses. The sound of Luther's hammer awakened echoes throughout all Christendom. Fires were ignited that could never be put out. The reformation of the sixteenth century swung into history. Truth crushed to earth rose again. In " three days and a half," Christ's witnesses came back to life.

No one would claim, of course, that this is an exact fulfillment of Apocalyptic vision. It illustrates, however, what John is saying in this passage; the witnessing power of the church can never be crushed. The voice of truth can never be silenced. It is foolish to think so. God is Truth and Truth is God. Christ and His church are one.

III. The last section of the chapter beginning with the fifteenth verse, is a scene that sets forth *The Certainty of Victory*. Secure in her life, unshakable in her faith, persistent in her witnessing power, the church will go on through foul weather and fair until " The kingdom of the world is become the Kingdom

of our Lord, and of His Christ: and He shall reign for ever and ever."

When the seventh trumpet sounds great voices are heard in heaven. The Revelation echoes with voices. It rings with shouts of triumph. Singing breaks forth at almost every turn. No other book is quite like it. Fifty-six times voices are heard, and they are all voices of victory. The voice of the Lamb, angels' voices, elders' voices, voices of "living creatures" and of redeemed souls, "twice ten thousand times ten thousand," all combine to give such a vision of victory as would enable a needy-souled generation to endure the hot fires of persecution. It is worth noting that no devils in the drama have voices, they are all dumb devils. Evil passions do not awaken song. Sin is not musical. It smothers the singing impulse in the heart and paralyzes the vocal chords. Virtue sings, faith sings, hope sings, love sings. Jesus and His disciples sang on the eve of Calvary. Paul and Silas sang in prison. The Scotch Covenanters were always ready with a psalm. The followers of Gustavus Adolphus went singing into battle. Cromwell's Ironsides sang their way to victory. Always and everywhere the church has sung its way through history, and she will sing her way to triumph. Heaven be thanked for a religion that has set the world to singing hymns and psalms, anthems and oratorios.

So the seventh trumpet blows, and John hears a great chorus of voices. How far off in time he does not know, nor does he care. The Bible does not bother about times and seasons; it never gives dates. No prophet ever reckons with the time element. There

are certain things John knows, and they are enough to inspire his hope of final victory. He knows, for example, that a " little book " is here to stay, that the inner life of the church is perfectly secure, that the witness of the church will persist through the years in spite of all opposition. As a result of these convictions he hears somewhere off there in the future voices proclaiming, " The kingdom of the world is become the Kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ." He hears the redeemed singing, " We give thee thanks, O Lord God, the Almighty, which art and which wast; because Thou hast taken Thy great power, and didst reign." The time for judging the dead, for vindicating the prophets and the saints, has come. The world has passed under the rule of its rightful Lord; all departments of life are consecrated and redeemed. It is the one far off divine event toward which the whole creation moves.

Many are asking to-day, Is the church of any real value? Is she doing anything worth while? Would we be any the worse if the church perished entirely? Are not its methods antiquated, outworn? Has the world not hopelessly outdistanced her creed? Give yourself no concern about that, my brother. So long as there are devout believers there will be a visible church. So long as there is a militant church, the future is hopeful. Let us throw off our apathy, heal our divisions, cease our bickerings about unimportant matters, stop our quarreling over non-essentials and give ourselves to the weightier matters of the Gospel. Speed the feet of them that bear good tidings, the church rides on!

"Onward, then, ye people, join our happy throng;
Blend with ours your voices in the triumph song;
Glory, laud and honor unto Christ the King,
This through countless ages, men and angels sing."

Some day we will join in the victory anthem. We can not sing it now, but we can sing the prelude. Faith and hope never rise higher than when we sing:

"Christ shall have dominion over land and sea,
Earth's remotest regions shall His empire be;
They that wilds inhabit shall their worship bring,
Kings shall render tribute, Nations serve our King."

X

A HOLY WAR

REVELATION 12:1–17

AND *the great dragon was cast down, the old serpent, he that is called the Devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world; he was cast down to the earth, and his angels were cast down with him.* Rev. 12:9.

X

A HOLY WAR

REVELATION 12:1–17

EVER since the eighth century, when Mohammedanism moved like a serpent across Northern Africa, stepped upon Gibraltar, swept the fields of Spain, and crossing the Pyrenees, planted the conquering crescent on the plains of France, only to be beaten down by Charles the Hammer and compelled to recoil back into Africa and the Orient — from that day to this civilization has felt a kind of dread at the thought of a possible Holy War in which all Mohammedanism would be arrayed against all Christendom, with results that no man could predict. That fear was revived in our own day when the Allies crossed swords with the Turks, and General Allenby bravely marched his regiments across the deserts, pushing his way into the very heart of the Mohammedan world. No such holy war resulted; our fears were ill founded. The possibility of such a war is now more remote than ever.

The twelfth chapter of Revelation describes another holy war, one that is not only possible but actual, imminent, constant. It has been in progress for ages, ever since God said to the serpent in Eden, "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and

thou shalt bruise his heel." The fifteenth verse of the third chapter of Genesis is the first Biblical declaration of war between good and evil, between God and the devil, Christ and Satan, truth and error, the Kingdom of Heaven and the kingdom of this world. The twelfth chapter of Revelation has that holy war under review.

The first grand section of the Apocalypse portraying the unfolding of the Kingdom of God in relation to world events, closes with the eleventh chapter. We now enter the second grand section, dealing with the same general aspects of history but under an entirely new set of symbols and figures. The revisers have helped us to understand this chapter by dividing it into three logical paragraphs:

I. *The Issue is Joined.*

"And there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars.

"And she being with child cried travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

"And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and behold a great red dragon having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

"And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and he did cast them to the earth: and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.

"And she brought forth a man child who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God and to his throne.

" And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days."

Give your imagination its wildest flight; you can not outdo John's imagery in this dramatic passage. Enter — a woman nearing the hour of her accouchement. She is arrayed with the sun, wears a tiara of stars and has the moon as her footstool. Enter — a seven-headed, ten-horned dragon with a tail so vast that he sweeps one-third of the stars from the sky. Like Herod of old, the dragon crouches near, ready to destroy the newborn son at the earliest opportunity. Her son is caught up to heaven and the woman escapes to the wilderness where she is providentially nourished and protected. The dragon is foiled in his initial attack.

What does this woman represent? There are three notable women in Revelation, the sun-crowned woman of this chapter; the scarlet woman in the seventeenth chapter, and the Bride of the Lamb in the twenty-first chapter. Who is this sun-clothed, star-crowned woman? Simply, yet profoundly, she represents the spiritual, ideal church in its widest sweep, arrayed in light and reflecting " the light of the world."

The figure is not original with John. He borrowed it from certain prophets of the Old Testament who frequently represented the church under the figure of a wife or bride. " Thy maker is thy husband, I have espoused thee to myself." Hosea calls the church of his day an " unfaithful wife." The Roman Catholics interpret the symbol as referring to the Virgin Mary,

to which no exception is taken provided Mary is regarded as a type of the church, the soul of the church personified.

What is the mission of the church? It is primarily to save men and to furnish an earthly spiritual home for the people of God. It is hers to evangelize the world and establish the Kingdom of God. Define it as you may, any definition in the end will resolve itself into the fundamental idea in John's mind. The mission of the church is to bring forth Christ to the world. It was the mission of the church in the old dispensation. The goal of Old Testament history was the birth of Christ, the Messiah; and the mission of the New Testament church is to bring Christ forth as the hope of mankind. She travails until Christ is formed in the thought and the life of the world. It is the fundamental law of her being, the one excuse for her continued existence. It may mean pain and suffering and self-sacrifice, but until she has brought Him forth as the Shepherd of His people, ruling the world with a rod of iron, the motherly mission of the church is unfulfilled. How can she accomplish that mission if the spirit and the soul of Christ is not in her and she be cursed with spiritual sterility?

What does the dragon represent? He is a fierce monster, hideous in appearance and dreadful to sight. Needless to say, no such creature exists, nor ever has existed. He is a fabled monster of pre-historic days. It is a symbol of that old serpent, the Devil, whose form is first seen in the garden of Genesis and whose slimy trail can be traced down through the ages. He dragged himself across the centuries from Eden to

Bethlehem. When Jesus was born in the City of David — the old dragon was there crouching at the gate, ready to spring and to destroy the Christ child. Escape lay through flight into Egypt where He was providentially protected for a season. The dragon again leaped to the attack in the wilderness, and again Jesus escaped through the word of God and the ministering angels. Hell finally broke loose in a last supreme effort to accomplish his ruin. All the black passions of the bottomless pit rallied at Golgotha. Jesus was nailed to the Cross and hurried to the tomb. Just as the dragon was preparing to rejoice over the victory, Jesus again escaped through death and resurrection and was caught up to a throne of power. In the first historic encounter between the dragon and the Son of God, the anti-Christ is utterly defeated.

II. *The War is Carried to Heaven.*

"And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

"And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

"And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

"And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb,

and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death.

"Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabitants of the earth and of the sea! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time."

As you read these verses, remember John is still writing a drama of spiritual truth. The scene changes. The field of action is in heaven. When the Christ is caught up to the throne of God, the dragon follows him to glory. The battle is joined afresh between the angels of God led by Michael and the fallen angels led by the dragon. To such a struggle there could be only one issue. The dragon and his angels, working through slander, deception and open hostility, are cast out of heaven and exiled to earth, which thenceforth becomes the sphere of their activity. Recall when the seventy returned from their mission and reported that even devils were subject to them in Christ's name, Jesus listened thoughtfully, and with a faraway look, said, "I beheld Satan fallen as lightning from heaven."

This paragraph forms the background of the first book of "Paradise Lost," in which Milton pictures the war between Michael and the dragon as taking place before creation. John, however, thinks of it as taking place after the resurrection and the ascension. Now, of course, neither John Milton nor John the Apostle were writing a literal history of an actual war in heaven. The Apocalypse, like "Paradise Lost," is a spiritual poem. It sets forth in dramatic form the fact that the conflict between good and evil, the King-

dom of Christ and the kingdom of the dragon, has a wider range than this visible earth and involves consequences in the spiritual order. That much seems clearly implied in the passage. Further than that we are not prepared to go.

III. *The War is Renewed on Earth.*

"And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.

"And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

"And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.

"And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.

"And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ."

When the dragon saw that he could not destroy the woman's son, and that by His resurrection and ascension He became the undefeatable Master of the spiritual world, the dragon in desperation began to make war on the woman and the rest of her seed, that is, on the church and her entire membership. We need have no trouble in understanding the writer's meaning here. The language is highly symbolic, but the truth embodied is a simple fact of Christian his-

tory. The same sinister power of evil that lifted its murderous hand against Christ, hurled itself against the Christian Church at the very beginning of her career and continued to torment her down through the centuries. Christ had hardly ascended when the persecution of the church began with the stoning of Stephen. Judaism, fired with bigotry and prejudice, and Romanism armed with the weapons of civil power, assaulted the church repeatedly, almost continuously. For three centuries persecution was the leading fact of Christian history. Bitter the experience and hot the fires of those early years, but not without the forge and the anvil was Christian life and faith to be hammered into shape for its task of world conquest.

The woman in order to save her life, is compelled to flee into the wilderness where the very earth helped to sustain her. She was providentially nourished for 1260 days, three and one-half years, a period of time undetermined and indefinite. Where do we find the church during that early period? In catacombs, in dens and caves of the earth, exiled to the mountains and on islands of the sea, in remote and inaccessible parts of the empire. She was hunted, outlawed, oppressed. A flood of false accusations and pernicious lies and fearful persecutions was poured after her, but somehow the dragon could not overwhelm her. In spite of adverse winds and dreadful storms, she kept her lamp of truth burning and shining through the welter. No man can read with open mind the story of those early years without having his faith in Christianity strengthened. It is a commentary, three centuries long, on our Lord's declaration, " The gates of

hell shall not prevail against her." It is more than a record of human endurance, it is a story of divine intervention.

I have no fears for the church to-day. They tell us she is in a state of decline, that she no longer has a voice that commands, nor a soul that wins, nor a faith that burns, that she has lost almost entirely her hold on the hearts and consciences of men. There are a lot of somber Jeremiahs lamenting the empty pews in Zion. The membership of the church, they say, is being Babylonized, carried into captivity by pleasure parks, "movies," and automobiles. A few years ago they were telling us that the saloon, the dance halls, skating rinks and bicycles were making havoc of the churches. Weeping prophets felt as sure then as they do now that the church could not withstand the currents running against her, that the dragon was winning more converts than Christ. Two-hundred years ago Defoe evidently felt the same way about it when he wrote, — it was a proverb in Defoe's day —

"Wherever God erects a house of prayer
The devil always builds a chapel there:
And 'twill be found, upon examination,
The latter has the larger congregation."

Dismiss all that sort of pessimism from your mind, my brother. Keep close to the Seer of Patmos, and know that the same power that nourished the church in the wilderness and the welter of her early experience, will be with her still "for a time, times, and half a time." Let Charles Wesley sing his faith into your soul:

"See the gospel church secure,
And founded on a Rock!
All her promises are sure;
Her bulwarks who can shock?
Count her very precious shrine;
Tell, to after ages tell,
Fortified by power divine,
The Church can never fail."

The faith and the vision of Frederick W. Faber were never more needed than now. We would do well to learn the lines by heart, and listen to the notes of the song until they have mastered our souls:

"O, it is hard to work for God,
To rise and take His part
Upon this battlefield of earth,
And not sometimes lose heart!

"He hides himself so wondrously,
As though there were no God;
He is least seen when all the powers
Of evil are most abroad.

"Or He deserts us at the hour
The fight is all but lost;
And seems to leave us to ourselves
Just when we need Him most.

"Ill masters good; good seems to change
To ill with greatest ease;
And, worst of all, the good with good
Is at cross-purposes.

"Ah! God is other than we think;
His ways are far above,
Far beyond reason's height, and reached
Only by childlike love.

"Workman of God! O, lose not heart,
But learn what God is like;
And in the darkest battlefield
Thou shalt know where to strike.

"Thrice blest is he to whom is given
The instinct that can tell
That God is on the field when he
Is most invisible.

"Blest, too, is he who can divine
Where real right doth lie,
And dares to take the side that seems
Wrong to man's blindfold eye.

"For right is right, since God is God;
And right the day must win;
To doubt would be disloyalty,
To falter would be sin!"

XI

A COMBINE OF BEASTS

REVELATION 13:1–17

AND *he stood upon the sand of the sea. And I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads. . . .* Rev. 13:1.

AND I *saw another beast coming up out of the earth. . . . And he exerciseth all the authority of the first beast in his sight.* Rev. 13:11, 12.

XI

A COMBINE OF BEASTS

REVELATION 13:1–17

THERE are certain chapters in the Bible that are usually passed over as containing nothing of real value for men and women of to-day. This chapter is one of them. It is not regarded as a field that yields material for sermons. I have never preached from it myself, and I have never heard another preach from it. In all the catalogs of printed sermons that have come to hand, I do not recall having ever seen a sermon based on any text in the chapter.

Should a man announce a random sermon from the chapter, he might be asked point blank what any sensible man can possibly find in a zoölogical garden of this kind that could either interest him or help him to unravel the mystery of life or solve the problem of religion. Had we not better blue pencil the chapter and relegate its hideous monsters to the limbo of things dead and forgotten? Personally, I do not feel that way this morning. The passage is not only Scriptural, it is rational and contains rational ideas. John was not mad when he wrote it. Like Whitwell Wilson, "so far from finding these visions dull, I rather feel as if I were hot on the scent like a detective seeking a clue to some mystery."

If you will ponder the verses of this chapter, I think you will discover that it is in substance a pictorial representation of a governmental policy that has wrought untold havoc in the history of civilization. In the background is a principle that lies deep down in the foundations of the American Republic. It is a far cry from the thirteenth chapter of Revelation to the Constitution of the United States, and yet the framers of that Constitution sensed the wisdom of John when they wrote the first amendment, and said, once for all, "Congress shall make no law respecting the establishment of religion or abridging the free exercise thereof." I think we shall discover that the seer of Patmos and the founders of the American government were looking in the same direction.

The chapter recounts the devilish work of two revolting beasts. They were inspired by the dragon to make havoc of the Christian church and if possible to utterly destroy the Christian religion.

The first is a *Sea-born Beast.* John, from his vantage ground in heaven, is looking down on the drama of history. He beholds the restless sea of international life swept with storms, tossed about with every wind, fomenting parties, leagues, alliances and troubles innumerable. It is a sea that lifts empires on its crest only to sink them one after another in the ocean of oblivion. From this troubled sea of international life John sees a fierce, dominating beast arise. He has seven heads and ten horns, the body of a leopard, the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a lion. He is intelligent and powerful, he springs cat-like, crushes and devours. We might spend hours discussing the various

theories held regarding this monstrous beast and the only result would be confusion. Let it suffice to say that John borrowed this vision in part from the seventh chapter of Daniel. What the latter saw was four beasts, a leopard, a bear, a lion, and a fourth creature with seven heads and ten horns. The interpretation of Daniel's beasts generally accepted is that they represent the empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Medo-Persia, and Greece under Alexander. However these nations may have differed, they had this in common — they were all bitterly hostile to that force in history known as the Kingdom of God. Whatever and whoever in any age represented that Kingdom was the object of their attack.

John sees not four monsters, only one, and that one embodying all four of Daniel's beasts. The sea-born beast of John's Vision manifestly represents Rome heading up in a beastly emperor. Profane history confirms the vision at almost every point. Put these facts in parallel columns and see how they balance. John says the beast had " authority over every people and tribe and tongue and nation." History tells to what extent Rome was the proud mistress of the world. John says the beast " uttered great blasphemies." Secular history recounts how the Emperors finally arrogated to themselves divine titles and assumed the prerogatives of deity. State papers and decrees of the throne were sent out by Domitian under the blasphemous heading, " Our Lord and our God ordains." John says it was given the beast " to make war with the saints and overcome them." In the light of that statement, read in profane history the account of the ten

great Roman persecutions continuing from the days of Nero to the reign of Diocletian.

The beast, therefore, represents primarily the political power of Rome. It just as truly represents any other political power or civil government in any age that sets itself defiantly against the Kingdom of Truth and persecutes the followers of Christ. The sea-born beast was Egypt in Moses' day, or Babylon in Isaiah's and Jeremiah's day. It was the government of Antiochus Epiphanes in the days of the Maccabees. It was Rome in John's day, Spain in the days of the Inquisition, the government of Mary in the days of John Knox, the Roman hierarchy in the days of Huss and Zwingle and Luther. It is Turkey in our own day.

You will find in the ninth and tenth verses a further illustration of the purpose for which John wrote the Apocalypse. In these verses he appeals to the troubled, persecuted Christians to be patient, telling them not to resist their tormentors. If any man is sent into captivity, let him go. If any man is condemned to death, let him accept his fate. Do not be tempted to meet sword with sword. The way to victory lies not through resistance but through patient suffering and sacrifice. John never forgot that night in the garden when Jesus said to impetuous Peter, "Put up again thy sword into its place: for all that take the sword shall perish with the sword." Christ's Kingdom is not of this world, if it were His servants would fight. They are not commissioned to strive with carnal weapons. "The way of the Cross leads" to victory.

The second monster is an *Earth-born Beast.* There can be no mistaking this second beast. It is a symbol

of false religion. There is no possibility of confusing him with the first beast. They are utterly different. The second resembles a lamb in outward appearance, but has the nature of a dragon, the spirit of a devil. He does not, like the first, accomplish his designs by brute force. He works his mischief by magic and deception. "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves." The first beast commands and gives authority to the second; the second makes images of the first and persuades men everywhere to worship the image. They mutually aid and serve one another. The two are in league and covenant.

A little familiarity with the facts of history will help to illuminate the meaning of this chapter. It is a pictorial review of current history in John's day. When the Apocalypse was written, the Emperor Domitian was on the throne. He was not one of the strong Caesars. As a matter of record, his wars were almost all defensive, "his victories were defeats; his captives purchased slaves; his triumphs audacious falsehoods." In order to save his royal face and to strengthen his position in an Empire that was rapidly turning against him, he called religion to his aid. He caused the priests of Rome to erect images of himself, and gave them authority to compel "all small and great, rich and poor, bond and free" to worship the emperor. Christians who renounced their faith and embraced Emperor Worship, were given "stigmata," metal checks or marks on the body, which were the signs of their apostasy and gave immunity from persecution. Those who refused to burn incense to the

emperor were disfranchised politically, ostracized socially and boycotted commercially. Like the early Christians in Jerusalem, they could neither buy in the open market nor sell. They were deprived of the very means of livelihood. If social and economic pressure failed to accomplish its purpose, sterner methods were adopted. They were exiled to die in the mountains or on distant islands of the sea; they were thrown to wild beasts; nailed to crosses and tormented by every means that could be conceived in devil-possessed brains. The civil authority and the religious authority of the empire were, therefore, united in a common effort to crush the followers of the Nazarene, to annihilate the Church.

While the earth-born beast to John's mind represented Caesar worship, it represents just as well any religion that is created or controlled by the state and used by the state to promote its own temporal ends. The chapter reflects as in a glass a phase of history to which we can only call attention in this discussion. Again and again in history, when a Godless government discovered that religion is a real force in human life, commanding the consciences and holding the loyalties of men, that government has almost always coveted the use and the control of religion for the accomplishment of its sordid purposes. And wherever and whenever a Pagan government and a false religion, or a Godless government and a Christless church have been merged under one head and controlled by one authority; wherever church and state have been married, the results have always been similar to those John describes, the degradation of both church and

state, irresponsible autocracy and the perpetration of fearful injustices.

This combine of beastly powers, the joining of civil and religious authority in one hand, reached its devilish climax in the tenth and thirteenth centuries when carnal popes arrogated to themselves the title of "God's vicegerent on earth." Innocent III believed that as successor to Peter, Christ had given him authority not only over the church but over the entire world of human affairs. He declared, "As the sun and moon are placed in the firmament, the greater as the light of day and the lesser of the night, so there are two powers on earth, the greater the pontifical and the lesser the royal." Therefore, the right to trample on the necks of kings was his by divine prerogative. The lives of men, the crowns of kings, the destinies of nations, were in his hand. Princes, states and parliaments were obliged to bring their differences to him for adjudication. He made and unmade kings and kingdoms at will. In order to enforce his decrees and to compel the world to bow to his will, he inaugurated the Inquisition, a hell-born institution which almost crushed truth from the earth.

The story of Pope Gregory VII and Henry IV of Germany is an interesting bit of historic romance. They did not get on very well, these two. Each claimed to be the superior. Neither cared to be thought inferior to the other. Gregory finally issued a bull against Henry in which occurred these words, "Come now, I pray you, O most Holy Fathers and Princes (Peter and Paul) that all the world may know that if the Pope is able to bind and loose in heaven,

he is able on earth to take away, or give to each, according to his merits, empires, kingdoms, duchies, counties, marquisates, and the possessions of all men." Gregory did not think to annihilate secular government, but he was determined to subordinate it to Papal jurisdiction. The excommunicated king turned on the Pope like a tiger, dispatching this curt message to the Vatican, "I, Henry, King by the grace of God, say unto you, Get down, Get down, and let another ascend the chair of St. Peter who will not cloak violence with religion." The Pope promptly responded by absolving the people of the empire from allegiance to the crown. With a single stroke of the papal pen, the King lost his crown and his kingdom. Deposed, forsaken, humiliated, Henry with his wife and baby, crossed the mountains to Canossa, where for three days he stood barefoot in the snow waiting to be admitted to the Pope's presence and to receive absolution. The world has moved a long distance from Canossa since that day in 1077. An ex-President of the United States (Heaven bless his memory!) visiting Rome in the 20th century acts very differently from an ex-King of Germany visiting Canossa in the eleventh century.

Papal Rome during the middle centuries, like pagan Rome of earlier centuries, became mistress of the world, and inspired all the terrors of her ancient name. The great struggle of civilization from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries was largely a struggle to sever the political rights of nations from the religious authority of Rome. Little by little the nations won their rights. Papal hands were gradually torn loose from the throats of kings and parliaments, until to-day

the Vatican seems quite satisfied to confine its activities to matters religious, its rightful sphere. The world is pretty thoroughly evangelized with the American doctrine that church and state are two distinct things and must be kept forever separate. Even in those countries where the church is still measurably under the control of the state, an enlightened public sentiment acts as a check valve to prevent the evils latent in such a system. In the "land of the free and the home of the brave," church and state are two separate institutions, two and forever separate. We Americans are sensitive at that point. We have a right to be, and we need to be. Politicians and ecclesiastics alike will do well to settle themselves once and for all to the mutual policy of "hands off." They must. The American people will see to that.

XII

THE ARITHMETIC OF REVELATION

REVELATION 13:18

HERE *is wisdom. He that hath understanding, let him count the number of the beast; for it is the number of a man: and his number is Six hundred and sixty and six.* Rev. 13:18.

XII

THE ARITHMETIC OF REVELATION

REVELATION 13:18

NO other single text of Scripture has baffled interpreters more completely than this one. Many writers close their study of the verse by confessing to a feeling of uncertainty or frankly admitting a sense of defeat. One summarily dismisses the text by saying, "I have not the slightest idea of its meaning." Dr. J. H. Masterman in his "Studies in the Book of Revelation," believes, "It is better to confess that we can not interpret the riddle." One of the very best commentaries, after stating its preference of the various theories advanced, concedes "however, the liability of error in a case of this kind."

In view of this uncertainty, I have been tempted to ignore the text, and still feel rather hesitant about handling it at all. However, since our studies have brought us squarely to the point, I see no reason for avoiding the thing entirely, simply because it presents apparent difficulties. There is a peculiar fascination about the text. It commands attention. One may pass it to-day; he will come back to it to-morrow. He can not leave it alone. There is a reason. It is like giving an ambitious student a hard problem in higher algebra and daring him to find the solution. The

number of the beast is "Six hundred and sixty and six," and "it is the number of a man." Find the man. If John had actually tried to fascinate his readers with a puzzle and tantalize them with the witchery of numbers, he could hardly have done better. It is a problem in spiritual arithmetic.

I have felt all along that a word regarding the symbolism of numbers as employed by the sacred writers would be necessary before we could lay aside our study of Revelation. I do not know of any better place to pause for such a word than at this verse.

The ancient Jew habitually thought, spoke and wrote in symbols. It is still a characteristic of the oriental mind. To state moral and spiritual truth under the symbol of numbers was a common practice, as anyone who reads his Bible must be aware. From Genesis to Revelation numbers are constantly employed that way. In no book of the Bible do numbers occur more frequently than in the Apocalypse. It adds, subtracts, divides and multiplies numbers repeatedly, as if the writer were eager to find figures that would adequately represent his meaning. It is when we take these numbers to stand for actual quantities and exact periods of time that we are led to accept impossible views of inspiration, views that history and experience have been discrediting for ages. To read the Vision of John intelligently it is necessary, therefore, to give some attention to the symbolic meaning attaching to certain numbers:

One signifies that which stands single and alone; a whole, a unit in itself.

Two, the lowest plural number, signifies that which

has added weight, like a truth confirmed. Thus you have the two witnesses, the two olive trees, the two beasts, mutually confirming and strengthening each other.

Three is everywhere in Scripture the divine number. It is a symbol of the trinity, God, the Father, Son and Spirit.

Four is the earth number, suggested by the four points of the compass, the "four corners" of the earth. So we have in Revelation the "four horses of the Apocalypse," the four angels holding back the four winds, the four living creatures about the throne, four walls to the Holy City. The figure four always has some reference to earth.

Seven, obtained by adding three, the divine number, to four, the earth number, is a symbol of completeness, perfection. There are seven days in the week, and the seventh hallows and completes the other six. Seven times Elijah's servant scanned the heavens, seven times Naaman must bathe in the Jordan. We must forgive seventy times, and seventy times seven. Seven words were spoken on the cross. There were seven churches in Asia. The golden candlesticks were seven. The dragon had seven heads. Seven everywhere represents that which is perfectly complete, adequate for its purpose.

Three and one-half is a broken seven, the half of seven. It signifies an undetermined, indefinite period of time, like the troubled period of the church. The two witnesses preached three and a half years. The enemy triumphed over them three and a half days. The unregenerate trampled the outer courts of the

church three and a half years. The sea-born beast persecutes the saints forty-two months, that is, three and one-half years. The sun-crowned woman and her son are nourished in the wilderness twelve hundred and sixty days, three and one-half years. It signifies a limited period, the duration of which is indefinite and unknown.

Ten is the number of secular completeness. Thought turns immediately to the decimal system, to the multiplication table, to our national coinage, to ledgers, budgets and prices. We have ten fingers and toes. The ancient Hebrew tax was one-tenth of a man's income. The moral law is summed up in ten commandments. A beast with ten horns is a government with perfect secular power.

Twelve is the church number. It is obtained by multiplying four, the earth number, by three, the divine number, and suggests that the church is possible only when the divine and the human are joined together in multiplication. There were twelve patriarchs in the Old Testament church and twelve apostles in the New, a total of twenty-four, the exact number of the elders seen about the throne of God. It is a symbol of the church in both dispensations.

Six is one-half of twelve and one less than seven. It is, therefore, a symbol of that which falls short of perfection, and is in no sense spiritual. We will come back to that in a moment.

Seventy, that is, seven times ten, signifies an all-embracing completeness, a completeness which is both secular and sacred. There were seventy members in the Jewish Sanhedrim; the captivity lasted seventy

years, signifying a period that was perfectly complete for the accomplishment of its divine purpose.

One thousand is the cube of ten. It is the longest period of time spoken of in the Apocalypse. There are six references to it in the twentieth chapter, and it is found nowhere else. For a thousand years the devil is bound and for the same thousand years the martyred saints reign with Christ. It signifies an ideal period of unknown length.

The symbolic use of numbers charmed the Jew. We can understand in part why he revelled in it. The mystery of numbers still fascinates people with a kind of magic. One of the most effective pieces of advertising ever hit upon was the adoption of the figure " 57 " as the symbol of a certain enterprising pickling concern. Flashed on the page of newspaper and magazine, painted in white on mountain cliffs, set in flowers on grassy terraces, or brilliantly illuminated on tall buildings, on ocean piers and on islands in the sea, " 57 " has aroused more curiosity and has occasioned more comment than whole volumes of advertising " write-ups " could possibly have done. It is an ingenious use of the psychology of numbers, and has worked like magic. If you were to awake some morning and find the figure " 23 " painted on your front door, could you escape the impulse to pack your grip? You would not take the first train leaving town, of course, but you would wonder why any one wanted you to leave. If you were invited to a dinner party and discovered that you were the thirteenth person to sit down, would you remain to eat your dessert? I would but would you? How many sky-scrapers have

a thirteenth floor? Were you ever assigned to room " 13 " in a hotel? I have heard it said that if you were to give your card to an usher in a theater and ask him to hand it to the lady in Box 13, the usher would promptly tell you that there is no such box, what is supposed to be " 13 " is " 12-A." You may call it superstition but it illustrates how a mystic number can sway the minds of men like a magic wand. An English writer explaining the psychology of the figure " 13," says, " It is the subconscious echo of an original horror, — the horror over a supper party where thirteen men included both the Christ and Judas Iscariot," both of whom were doomed, one to the Cross, the other to self-destruction.

Edgar Allan Poe wrote many weird tales that the world somehow refuses to let die. Probably the most popular of them all is " The Gold Bug." A hermit, William Legrand, living on Sullivan's Island, near Charleston, is walking one day along the beach and finds near the wreckage of an old ship a piece of parchment, badly weathered and half buried in the sand. He picks the thing up and thoughtlessly places it in his pocket. That evening he carelessly drops it on the warm hearth in front of the open fire. Under the chemical action of the heat there emerges on the parchment the pictures of a skull and a kid, and a long array of figures and signs. Legrand's curiosity is immediately awakened. It gradually dawns on him that the skull is the emblem of the pirate, that the kid stands for Captain Kidd, and that the figures and signs have a meaning and embody a message. The cryptogram is patiently deciphered. Following its directions,

Legrand is led into the deep forest where he finally locates at the foot of a tree the buried treasures of the famous and fabled Captain Kidd. It is a story in which Poe made clever use of the popular interest in the mystery of numbers.

Imbed an idea in mystical figures, enshrine a truth in numbers, and you captivate the interest of the world. For that reason, this enigmatical verse of Scripture has thrown a weird spell over the minds of Bible students. Curiously enough it occurs in the thirteenth chapter of Revelation.

Let us look more closely at the number, "six hundred and sixty and six." It is the number of the second beast, which represents a false religion working hand in glove with a Godless government. All the authority of the state is conferred upon him. The emperor, holding in his hand the reins of both civil and religious authority, decrees that all non-conformists are to be harried out of the kingdom; all Protestants are to be imprisoned, exiled or killed. The number of the beast, six hundred and sixty and six, is the number of a man. There are two theories advanced regarding this strange verse with its tantalizing numeral:

First: It is held by some that six hundred and sixty-six actually spells a man's name. Those who hold to that view are at great pains to find the particular personage in history whose name it signifies. May I pause long enough to indicate the method of procedure? The world in which John lived, of course, did not use the Arabic numerals with which we are familiar. They were never employed in the west until after the Mohammedan invasion in the eighth century.

The Romans used Roman numerals, the Greeks, Greek numerals, and the Hebrews, Hebrew numerals. Each letter in those ancient alphabets was given a definite numerical value.

Now, John wrote in Greek and must have used Greek numerals. The problem, therefore, is to find that Greek word or name, the numerical value of the letters of which, when added together, will total six hundred and sixty-six. The title, "Lateinos," the Latin one, has exactly that numerical value, as you will observe from the following. L has the value of 30, a-1, t-300, e-5, i-10, n-50, o-70, s-200. The result is "666." Therefore, the beast "Lateinos" is the Latin One, the Latin Church, Latin Christianity, the papal hierarchy. "Its prayers are Latin, its canons are Latin, its decrees are Latin, its bulls are Latin, its worship is in Latin, it blesses and curses in Latin; all is Latin." It is a very clever piece of exegesis. But cleverness is not everything, common sense is something.

There are certain fatal objections to this method of dissecting the verse. First of all, John nowhere else uses figures and numerals that way. Furthermore, you can take any one of a great many institutions or persons in history, whose names with a little juggling can be worked to the tune of six hundred and sixty-six. Take the name of Nero Caesar, throw it into Hebrew, "Neron Kesar," let each letter have its numerical value in Hebrew, the result is "666." In similar fashion, the fatal number has been fastened on other names, Julian the Apostate, Genseric the Vandal, Mohammed, Napoleon. In our own day the name

of Kaiser Wilhelm has been twisted and turned and distorted to discover whether it might not yield the desired number. Protestants have made the verse spell the Latin Church or the names of certain unfortunate popes. Catholics on the other hand, can return the compliment, I doubt not, by proving with mathematical exactness that the number of the beast is the number of the name of John Calvin or Martin Luther.

Some one has suggested three rules by the help of which any ingenious person can make "666" spell almost any name: (1) If the given name does not yield the exact figure, add a surname or a title. (2) If the Greek numerals will not work, try it in Roman or Hebrew numerals. (3) Do not be too particular about the spelling.

It is our own conviction that "six hundred and sixty and six" is employed here with a symbolic meaning. As seven is the symbol of perfection, six is the symbol of that which falls short of it. It falls as far short of seven as eight goes beyond it. It signifies inability to reach the sacred point. The figure six awakened in the breast of the imaginative Hebrew the same feeling of dread that the figure thirteen awakens in the breast of the superstitious. There was a doom attaching to it. Triple the six, "let there be a multiple of it by ten and then a second time by ten until you obtain three mysterious sixes following one another, 6-6-6; and we have represented a potency of evil than which there can be none greater." Put yourself in the place of those early Christians and listen to that number as it rolls from Patmos, SIX! SIX! SIX! It falls like the solemn pronouncement of a fearful doom. Christians

were asking, with such a trinity of evil as the devil, a persecuting civil power and a godless religion arrayed against them, who could stand? The seer answers by saying in effect, "Never fear, the number of the anti-Christ spells fatalism." Read on through the fourteenth chapter, on through the remaining parts of the Vision, and you shall see before the drama closes all the powers of evil, the dragon, the beast and the false prophet going down to a dreadful fate.

The whole aim of the Gospel is to erase from the slate of life that fatal "six hundred and sixty and six" and to substitute therefor seven hundred and seventy and seven. The Gospel of Christ puts life over against death, a diadem of glory over against doom, regeneration over against degeneration. Just so long as Christians still see on the field of life the enemies of all righteousness, formidable like the second beast, whether singly or in combination, they may be sure that the days of the anti-Christ are not finished nor the years of the militant church ended. The war drags wearily on through the ages. The victory is slow but sure.

"Though a mighty foe assail thee,
Do not let thy courage fail thee.
Soldier, do not yield,
For God is on the field."

XIII

THE BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN

REVELATION 14:1–20

AND I *saw, and behold, the Lamb standing on the mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty and four thousand, having his name, and the name of his Father, written on their foreheads.*
Rev. 14:1.

XIII

THE BATTLE LINES ARE DRAWN

REVELATION 14:1–20

IF the Apostle John could stand in this pulpit as he appeared in the days when he wrote the Apocalypse; if we could look upon his saintly face and see those locks white with the snows of ninety odd years; if we could sit before those eyes that kindled with a strange spiritual lustre; if we could listen to his rich, mellow voice, and could hear him tell in simple language what he has written in this symbolic chapter, what a sermon and what a service this would be! If John could come back and talk to us about Jesus of Nazareth, whom he knew in the flesh, and could tell us of the unconquerable Christ whom he saw in vision, and could preach to us about the universal proclamation of the gospel, the terrible retribution of sin, the final overthrow of evil; if he could stand in my place here and tell you the difference between the dead who die in the Lord and the dead who die in sin, no one this morning could possibly feel dull, hearts would throb and eyes would be moist. John can not talk to us that way now. Neither could he talk that way to Christians in his own day. He was an exile on Patmos. He was therefore compelled to write his love-warm message. The ink of his pen has stood long and has grown cold.

So we put John aside, supposing he has no practical word for our day.

It is foolish to think so. I know what the trouble is with the Apocalypse. The average person is accustomed to have truth brought to him in plain, simple language. He does not like the mental effort required to grasp that same truth when presented in unfamiliar terms and highly dramatic form, and John is the spiritual dramatist of sacred literature. Let us make an honest effort to find the hidden truth in this fourteenth chapter.

I. *The Battle Lines are Drawn.* You will miss the significant setting of the chapter unless you consider it in connection with chapters twelve and thirteen. The three chapters taken together present two battle lines being drawn up for the age-long struggle between the Kingdom of Light and the Kingdom of Darkness.

You will recall that when the dragon was cast out of heaven his next move was to destroy the heaven-born son. Failing in that, he turns to destroy the woman herself, that is, the church. When she is caught away with her son and providentially protected and nourished, the dragon in desperation turns upon "the rest of her seed" and prepares to make war upon the entire membership of the church. He calls to his aid a sea-born beast, all the civil forces of the empire, and prepares to hurl them against Christianity. To make the issue doubly certain, the dragon calls in a second beast, all the religious forces of the empire. The powers of the state and the forces of religion are thus united under the dragon and marshalled in the plains

to be hurled against inoffensive and defenseless disciples. No more formidable combination of evil could be imagined. How could Christianity stand against a triple alliance with such power and resources?

It was a dark day that John pictured for the church. But follow him into the fourteenth chapter. With true dramatic instinct he quickly shifts the scene. The shadows flee, the light of morning rims the sky, and in the light of a new day we discover another battle line being drawn up. The followers of Christ, the redeemed of God, one hundred and forty-four thousand strong, are gathering on Mount Zion. Down on the plains the mad beasts and their frenzied followers are shouting, "Who is like unto the beast and who is able to make war with him?", but the Lamb is on Mount Zion, Christ is in His church, God is in His heavens. If you will dream over these chapters until you see with John's eyes, before you know it the notes of an old song will burst from your soul, and you will be singing:

"Wherefore do the nations rage
And the people vainly dream
That in triumph they can wage
War against the King supreme?

"According to my Holy will
I have set my King to reign,
And on Zion's holy hill
My Anointed I maintain."

As John stands enthralled by the vision, he hears voices, — voices again! He is always within the sound

of voices. Like Niagara, like the thunder of the sea breaking on the rugged shores of Patmos, the harpers harp and the voices sing, not an old song, but a new song, the Song of Redemption. Once before John had heard that song, but that was in heaven. Here the new song breaks forth on earth. The very mountains are flooded with music. God be praised for a church that has come singing its way down through the ages! Those who expect to sing in glory had better join the singing church on earth. For "no man could learn the song save the hundred and forty and four thousand, even they that had been purchased out of the earth."

There is no mistaking that company of one hundred and forty-four thousand. They bear the chevrons of service, the marks of the soldiers of Christ. "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the first fruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God." I am loath to hurry by a scene like that. Unborn sermons cry for utterance, are begging for deliverance in almost every passage of the book.

The battle lines are therefore drawn up in dramatic form; the stage is being set for the age-long conflict between the Lamb and the dragon, between the Kingdom of Christ and the kingdom of the world. The worshippers of the beast are marshalled on the plain, the worshippers of the Lamb on Mount Zion, the spiritual home of God's people.

II. *The Army is Recruited.* During a lull in the

battle in which both sides are strengthening their lines and preparing for the struggle, a dramatic thing occurs. John sees three angels flying in mid-heaven. They are the Recruiting Officers of the Army of the Lord.

Bear in mind this fact — a fact implied in the narrative — not all men were either in one army or the other. There were great masses of men who had not as yet committed themselves. Multi-millions had never even heard the name of the "Captain of our salvation." They bore neither the marks of the beast nor of the Lamb. Many of earth's tribes and tongues and peoples were neutral. Forth to the lands, to the homes and to the lives of all neutrals went the three angels to win recruits for Zion's army. They sought to accomplish their purpose by bringing three messages to bear on the minds of men.

The first angel flying in mid-heaven proclaims a universal gospel to "every nation, tribe and tongue and people." It is simply the dramatic setting of a truth which John had heard from Jesus' lips, "This gospel shall be preached unto the whole world and then shall the end come."

The second angel proclaims a message calculated to give pause to any man, whether a professing Christian or a neutral, who might be tempted to enlist with the worshippers of the beast. "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great." It is a word of prophecy stated as a fact of history. Go to the dragon if you must, fight for Babylon, if you will, but know this, — you are fighting for a losing cause. Babylon is doomed. Such is the message the second angel heralds.

We must tarry at Babylon long enough to discover,

if possible, what it represents. It is obviously a city or a state or an institution created by the dragon and the two beasts. That it symbolizes some terrible power in history which wielded or wields both secular and religious authority, is perfectly clear. The view that Babylon of the Apocalypse signifies the Roman Church was more generally held a few years ago than now. Many of the older interpreters taught that though it may have been in a limited sense a type of pagan Rome, it had its perfect prototype in Papal Rome. The theory was worked out with mathematical precision. Looking into history, it was discovered that papal assumption of temporal power dates from the year 752, when Pope Stephen finally arrogated to himself supreme authority both in church and state, becoming not only the spiritual head of the entire world but the political head as well, a bishop of bishops and a king of kings. In John's vision, Babylon is given authority to continue forty-two months, that is twelve hundred and sixty days, which are taken to mean years. Adding twelve hundred and sixty years to 752, you have the year 2012 A.D., the date fixed upon by a bald literalism for the final destruction of the Papal system. One writer in advancing this theory guards himself, however, by saying, "We would not speak too confidently on this point, not because we have any doubt that these visions refer to the Papal church or because we have any doubt that forty-two months symbolizes twelve hundred and sixty years, but because there is a question as to the exact time when the Papal system began." Personally, I could just as readily accept such an interpretation as

I could accept the 20th verse literally, and believe that the conquerors of mystic Babylon will ride through a river of blood bridle deep for a distance of 1600 furlongs, no more and no less.

From the time that the Tower of Babel first rose on the plains as a defiant challenge to Heaven, all through Scripture Babylon was a synonym for any nation or power in history that arrayed itself against God's chosen people or set itself against the Lord's anointed. Babylon stood to the Jew for pride of dominion, for the spirit that opposes itself to the Kingdom of God, for all that was sensual and devilish. The fall of ancient Babylon left a deep impression on the Hebrew mind, and became in time a fit symbol of that final ruin which will be visited at last on all principalities and powers and institutions opposed to the Kingdom of Christ. That, to us, is the message of the second angel. It was a timely message to herald in the first century, and it is no less timely now. Anchor your faith to the proposition that "the kingdom of this world" is doomed. A New Jerusalem will rise on the ruins of mystic Babylon.

The third angel announces the law of moral retribution. In the hurried moments of this sermon I hesitate to pause on the solemn words put in the mouth of this third messanger. Let it suffice to say this, the truth Jesus stated in these words, "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth," is here put in its most terrible and dramatic form. Read these symbolic words, if you will, in the light of the most certain of all truths, "The wages of sin is death." Whether you put the truth as Dr. Carpenter states

it, "Sin has the power to stamp its indelible features upon character and of giving to habit the force of destiny," or whether you allow it to stand in the sterner and more readily understood words of the third angel, it is a fearful thing to believe, and no man can question it. When sin drains the cup of pleasure, it drinks the unmixed cup of divine wrath. You can not mock God or tamper with moral law. "The wages of sin is death."

In conclusion remember that these three angels sent forth to recruit the armies of Zion, represent the mission and the work of the church in this dispensation. We are to recruit the army of the King of kings by proclaiming his gospel to every kindred and tongue and people. Go ye into all the world. Preach the love of God that passeth knowledge. Let every sinner in Christian lands and every neutral in pagan lands know that "Whosoever will" may enter in and find life. The gates of the city are ever open. The path to Mount Zion where the followers of the Lamb are rallying, is a straight path and narrow, but safe and sure. Let every man tune his voice to the "new song." Swell the anthem of redemption! Speed the gospel chariots! But as you go, proclaim in mid-heaven, "If any man worshippeth the beast and his image," and receiveth the marks of the beast upon his soul, "he also shall drink the wine of the wrath of God." Sinai stands immovable. The Decalogue is a fact. The judgments of heaven are true and righteous. Let no man mouth or mumble it, "The wages of sin is death."

XIV

SHORES OF THE CRYSTAL SEA

REVELATION 15:1–8

AND I *saw as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire; and them that come victorious from the beast, and from his image, and from the number of his name, standing by the glassy sea, having harps of God.* **Rev. 15:2.**

XIV

SHORES OF THE CRYSTAL SEA

REVELATION 15:1–8

ON a long sea voyage a ship is obliged frequently to take its bearings in order to determine its exact longitude and latitude and thus discover how much of the journey has been covered. We have traveled a considerable distance through the Revelation. We are in mid-ocean and the waters are not shallow. To halt now or to turn back would be to miss the wonders of the remaining stretches of the journey and to fail of our final destination, "a new heaven and a new earth." It may be worth while, therefore, to take our bearings anew.

The Revelation is not a prose composition. It is an imaginary drama of history. The personnel of the book, its form, its language, its action are all dramatic. The dramatis personae are God, the Almighty King; the Lamb, slain and victorious; angels and elders, redeemed saints and unregenerate sinners, kings and devils, hideous dragons and horned beasts. The scenic settings are sometimes in heaven, where are thrones and altars and temples, clouds and rainbows, golden streets and crystal seas. Some of its scenes are on earth, where are mountains and valleys and bottomless pits, troubled lands and restless seas, thunder and lightning, hailstones and earthquakes.

It is a moving picture of events, caught not with a moving picture camera but by the camera of faith and vision. It was intended to be reproduced, not on the screen of a cinematograph but on the screen of a spiritual imagination.

There are those who believe that the book sets forth in chronological order the movements and events of the present dispensation, beginning with the gospel of Jesus and ending with the millennium. The theory, nicely worked out, is more interesting than convincing. For example, the first six seals are supposed to set forth the events of Christian history from the gospel of Jesus until the fifth century. The seventh seal results in seven trumpets. The first six trumpets hastily review events from the fifth century until the Reformation in the sixteenth century. The seventh trumpet resolves itself into seven vials of woe. These seven vials have to do with the centuries lying between the Reformation and the end of the present order. According to this theory we are now living in the period of the vials. Likewise, the twelfth, thirteenth and fourteenth chapters, which are devoted to the sun-crowned woman and her son, the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, are supposed to cover the history of the church from the beginning of the gospel until the end of the present age.

Those who approach the book from that angle find an entirely different meaning in its pages from that which we have discovered. We can not accept any such mechanical view of Revelation. John held no chronometer in his hand and was not writing a chro-

nology of history. He dealt with facts and principles with which he was perfectly familiar, and with future events, but not in their sequence or in their order of time. A prophet deals primarily with the facts of his own day. Knowing the spiritual content of those facts, he forecasts with certainty the final issues. He sees future events but never in their sequence of time. Prophets, whether in the Old Testament or in the New, never see things in perspective. Even Jesus could not, or at least did not foretell times and seasons. Neither does John. Again and again, like a kaleidoscope, the Apocalypse sweeps the future and then swings back again and photographs the same facts and principles under different aspects, always leading to the same glorious results.

We now enter upon a new series of visions. The seven bowls set forth in general the same ideas and principles embodied in the seven seals and seven trumpets, but under a different aspect. You will remember that the second recruiting angel in the preceding chapter cried in mid-heaven, "Fallen, fallen is Babylon the Great." In this fifteenth chapter John begins his description of the movements and events that culminate in the crisis of the eighteenth chapter, where amid weeping and wailing, the great city of Babylon, stained with the blood of prophets and saints, crashes to earth and goes up in smoke. There can hardly be ground for doubting that Babylon represents Imperial Rome with its persecuting power and false religion.

The fifteenth chapter is a prelude to the sixteenth,

seventeenth and eighteenth. Two scenes are here presented, (1) Seven Angels with Seven Golden Bowls, and (2) the Shores of the Crystal Sea.

I. *Let us look at the Seven Angels with the golden bowls.* What is their appearance? They are arrayed in pure white linen with golden girdles about their breasts. God's heavenly messengers are girt with truth and clothed in spotless white. Once before these angels had been commissioned to blow the seven trumpets. Here again they are sent on their errands of judgment.

Whence came they? Silent as light, they file out of the "tabernacles of the testimony in heaven." They come from the Court of the Eternal where nations and peoples are indicted and judged.

What do they hold in those spotless hands? Not trumpets, nor bugles, nor swords. They carry golden bowls in which unspeakable plagues are mixed with the wrath of offended love and justice.

Who gave them those bowls? The God of love? No. The Lamb that was slain? No. One of the elders? No. An elder once came to John comfortingly and told him not to cry about the sealed book because the Lamb had prevailed to open its mystery. But the elders are silent now. Who, then, placed those bowls of wrath in angel hands? Turn back to the fourth chapter, and view again the four living creatures, full of eyes and equipped with wings, singing, "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty." Did we say that the four living creatures represented the life and the laws of nature? Mark now, it is one of the four living creatures who placed the vials

in the hands of the angels. Do not miss the subtle suggestion. The very laws of nature supply the bowls of wrath. The plagues are the penalties of broken laws, the toll that nature collects from her disobedient children. The bowls are spilled by the operation of eternal laws. You will find these vials of woe mirrored to-day on sick beds, in hospitals and asylums, in police courts, divorce courts, bankruptcy courts, criminal courts and reparation courts, "wherever life flaunts failure."

Can not those bowls of impending wrath be stayed by somebody's prayer? Can not some interceding Abraham hold back the hot fires from the doomed city? Not now. Too late. The temple is filled with the mystic cloud of the glory of God. None can enter his presence to plead for a "stay of sentence" until judgment is finished. The day is past, night has come.

In these soft relaxing days, some very nice people object to the phrase, "The wrath of God." They say that the idea is entirely contrary to the spirit of Jesus, that it makes the Bible unpopular, especially the Old Testament. My brother, the Bible is not concerned about popularity. It is concerned about truth. There are two high mountains in Scripture, Mount Sinai in the Old Testament and Mount Calvary in the New. The latter did not level down the former. Jesus did not muffle the thunder of Sinai. In every desert of sin, Sinai still casts its threatening shadow. The Gospel of Jesus does not tone down the Law of Moses. Let us insist on that. Moral law is a fact, sin is a fact, penalty is a fact, death is a

fact, hell is a fact. The Church need not hesitate to preach facts, nor apologize for believing facts. The ostrich does not change unpleasant facts by hiding her head in the sand. "The fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword" may be held in reserve for mercy's sake, but is still capable of being released.

II. In sharp contrast to the foregoing, the chapter visualizes another scene. It is on *The Shores of the Crystal Sea.* John never presents a black picture without also painting a bright one. More than any other book of the Bible, Revelation depicts dark scenes. Lines are heavier, shadows are deeper, skies are gloomier there than anywhere else. There is hardly a shadow, however, that is not rimmed with light. There is not a night hour that does not end in a morning glory; never a cloud, be it ever so dark and forbidding, without a silver lining. When the six seals have released the terrors of conquest, war, famine, pestilence and earthquakes, and we have seen the souls of martyrs crying to heaven, and begin to feel that there will be no morning to the night, immediately the gloom is dispelled by the vision of a great multitude which no man could number, arrayed in white and palms in their hands, singing the Oratorio of the Messiah. When the seven trumpets sound forth the judgments of hail and fire, smoking volcanoes and falling stars, eclipses of the sun and fearful slaughter, and we again stand appalled at the heavy night pressure, suddenly the light shines in darkness and we are confronted with another victory scene. The church, symbolized by the two witnesses, rises triumphant over the beast, and the shout of a great multitude is heard, singing,

"The kingdom of the world is become the Kingdom of our Lord, and of His Christ." When the dragon, the beast and the false prophet have been painted in the darkest colors, the writer quickly shifts the scene to Mt. Zion where the Lamb of God sits enthroned, mighty above all. Thus throughout the book the lights and shadows chase one another across the field of vision.

So here, as John begins the portrayal of the seven vials of woe, lest his readers should despair, with a few rapid strokes he depicts a wonder scene on the shores of the crystal sea. It is a sea shot through with fire, calm, smooth and lustrous, so unlike the storm-swept, troubled sea of international life from which the beasts arose. On its shores John sees a great company of people. How many he could not tell, but like the elders and the one hundred and forty-four thousand, they have harps from heaven's conservatory of music, and "they sing." Who sing? Why, of course, those who had risen victorious above the world, who had neither submitted to the authority of the beast nor worshipped his image, nor received his name, nor shared his doom. They had fought the good fight, they had finished the course, they had kept the faith. Here they had confusion, there calm and quiet; here resistance, there rest; here a cross, there a crown; here a sigh, there a song.

And what is the song they sing? We have already heard the notes of two songs, the Song of Creation in the fourth chapter, and the Song of Redemption in the seventh chapter. The third song in this chapter is a Song of Victory. It is like the song of Moses

sung by Israel on the banks of the Red Sea, and it is the song of the Lamb because through the blood of the Lamb they had conquered.

Ah, that crystal sea and its singing multitude! With what deep desire did John pray to be released from his bonds that he might join the happy throng. You, sitting there, cannot understand that longing. No, you would have to suffer what John suffered and what countless others in his day suffered, before you could feel desire for the shores of the crystal sea.

He sat there among the beetling cliffs of Patmos on a quiet evening after having borne the burden and heat of a toilsome convict's day. He was dreaming dreams and seeing visions. He gazed upon the cool, calm Aegean, aflame with the glory of an evening sunset, and he thought heaven must be like that calm, quiet, unruffled sea. He imagined he heard a great company on its shores singing and harpers playing, and he longed to be there. Have you entirely forgotten your "Uncle Tom's Cabin"? Do you recall that quiet Sabbath evening when Uncle Tom and Eva sat together on a little mossy seat at the foot of the garden? The placid waters of a little lake lay before them. Eva's Bible lay open on her knees as she read: "And I saw as it were a glassy sea mingled with fire." Suddenly Eva stopped reading and pointing to the lake said, "Tom, there 'tis." "What, Miss Eva?" "Don't you see? There's a sea of glass mingled with fire." Eva was pointing to the quiet water of the glassy lake as it rose and fell reflecting the glow of an evening sunset. They were there, Uncle Tom and Eva, unconsciously preparing to embark for the shores

of the crystal sea as they gazed on the sun-lit lake that quiet Sabbath evening. When the time came Uncle Tom was ready, and Eva was unafraid. Will you be loath to go?

"Sunset and evening star,
And one clear call for me!
And may there be no moaning of the bar,
When I put out to sea.

"For tho' from out our bourne of Time and Place
The flood may bear me far,
I hope to see my Pilot face to face
When I have crost the bar."

XV

SEVEN VIALS OF WOE

REVELATION 16:1–21

AND I *heard a great voice out of the temple, saying to the seven angels, Go ye, and pour out the seven bowls of the wrath of God into the earth.* Rev. 16:1.

XV

SEVEN VIALS OF WOE

REVELATION 16:1–21

NO matter what view one may take of this chapter, he cannot escape at certain points a feeling of insecurity. The meaning is somewhat obscured beneath unfamiliar figures and symbols. It will help us to understand the passage if we remember that it is a description of historic calamities viewed primarily in their relation to the Roman Empire. They are interpreted by the seer as divine judgments having their origin in heaven. A careful reading of the chapter reveals two noteworthy facts.

Mark first, John was familiar with Old Testament history. He knew his Bible. To be able to say that of any man is no mean compliment. When I read the sixteenth chapter I know that John was thoroughly acquainted with the story of Israel's deliverance from Egypt. The background of these verses is the first fifteen chapters of Exodus. Recall the catalogue of ancient plagues. The Egyptians are cursed with boils and blains; with bloody waters in which all life dies; with thunder and lightning; with flies and frogs and devastating hail. The escaping Israelites finally pass over the Red Sea on dry land while the pursuing armies of Pharaoh are overwhelmed in the flood. Recall also

that the total result of these judgments on Egypt was the hardening of the nation's spiritual arteries. She repented not. It was from this chapter of Israel's early history that John borrowed the symbols of the seven vials of woe. Prophecy is clothed in the garb of history.

Another fact seems perfectly obvious. The seven vials cover substantially the same ground surveyed in the vision of the seven trumpets. As was said in our last lecture, the Revelation is not a chronology of history. Like a kaleidoscope, it sweeps the field of events and then swings back again and views the same facts and conditions under different aspects, always leading to the same glorious result. As an illustration of that, take your seven trumpet visions in chapters seven and eleven inclusive, and lay them down in a parallel column with the visions of the seven vials, and you will discover at once a striking similarity. In each case judgment falls upon the earth, the sea, the streams, the sun and the river Euphrates. We naturally conclude, therefore, that the seer has pretty much the same judgments in mind, the main difference being in the severity of the vials when compared with the trumpets.

"And I heard a great voice . . . saying to the seven angels, Go, . . . and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth." Silent as light, fierce as lightning, terrible as an earthquake, the angels proceed on their mission.

The first angel poured his vial into the earth. Men were cursed with a "noisome and grievous sore." Mark you, the judgment falls on "the earth," that is,

the home, the sphere, of the second beast. The earth-born beast was a false religion that compelled men to worship the image of the sea-born beast. Heaven's judgment therefore falls first on a religion that misled men into idolatry. The readers would readily catch the veiled warning in this symbolic judgment. John is saying, "Let all those who are followers of Christ and who may be tempted to renounce their faith to become image worshippers, take heed." Whatever may be meant by "noisome sore," this much is clear, — nature, which is a veiled name for God, visits with terrible penalty the followers of a beastly life, whether that penalty be bodily disease, moral depravity or mental paralysis, or all three combined.

The second angel poured his vial into the sea, and "it became blood as of a dead man," corrupt, loathsome, death-dealing. "The sea." What is that? Why, of course, the origin, the home, of the first beast. The sea-born beast represents a persecuting Roman government. Therefore, the sea of national and international life is cursed and becomes a source of death and destruction. Such a vial of woe was emptied on "the sea" in the fall of the Roman Empire. All the institutions of civilization went down in blood and the world went groping its way into the dark ages. It was again emptied on the international sea in the years of the French Revolution, when all Europe splashed into a sea of blood and into a hell of fire and famine and pestilence. It was poured out again during the World War, which left all Europe bursting into volcanic eruptions, breaking into fragments and blazing in self-destruction. What will

survive in the aftermath no man knows. Unless Europe finds " balm in Gilead," all life-giving institutions, commerce, industry, agriculture, education and religion, everything essential to civilization, must perish in a sea of hate and bitterness. For upwards of ten years Europe has been a veritable sea of blood. The other day I heard one of our congressmen, a man who by virtue of his place on important committees knows whereof he speaks, declare that, if it were not for his faith in God and an all-wise Providence, the future of the world would look dark indeed. Heaven's judgments were not exhausted in those early centuries when the Apocalypse was written. Look abroad over Europe. Vials of woe are held in reserve for future days of reckoning, and they will be poured out when conditions are ripe. Be sure of that.

The third angel poured out his vial into the rivers and the fountains, and they became clotted with blood. " The rivers and the fountains." What are they? Why, they are the sources of supply, the feeders of the sea. That is to say, the curse falls upon the very sources of national and international life. Whatever the fountains and streams that created the life, the ideals and the spirit of the Roman Empire, in our own day we know thoroughly well what constitute the fountains of national life. The builders of a nation's life are its press, its literature, its commerce, its art, its homes, its schools and its churches. Woe to that nation whose fountain streams become clotted with corruption. When judgment falls on that nation, the very altars cry out, " True and righteous are thy judgments, O Lord God."

The fourth angel poured his vial upon the sun. Men were scorched with a great heat. Frankly, I do not know what meaning John intended to convey under this fourth symbol. It was enough for his readers to know that the very source of light and life would be cursed because of men's sins and would become the instrument of their punishment.

The contents of the fifth vial were poured upon the throne of the beast. The center of the empire is struck. The Kingdom plunges into darkness. Government totters to its ruin. Secular authority disappears. Anarchy reigns and men gnaw their tongues in pain. If you want to know what that dreadful phrase means, I commend to you Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire." But you do not care to read Gibbon. Then read Carlyle's "History of the French Revolution." No? Then read your daily papers and current magazines. I tell you there are men in Russia and in Germany who know, and there may yet be men in all Europe who will know, what it means to gnaw their tongues in the agony of social dissolution.

The sixth vial was emptied upon the Euphrates. The bed of the river was dried up and a way made for the passing of the Kings that come from the sunrising. The sixth vial takes us exactly to the point where the sixth trumpet took us. When the sixth trumpet blew a voice cried, "Loose the four angels that are bound on the River Euphrates," and immediately armies are seen sweeping across the field, twice ten thousand times ten thousand, hurrying to their attack on Rome. When the sixth vial is poured out

the waters of the river are dried up like the waters of the Red Sea, and a way is prepared for the kings that come from the east.

Can anyone doubt that the sixth trumpet and the sixth vial deal with one and the same thing? The Euphrates was the eastern boundary line of the Roman Empire. Beyond it were Parthia and Persia and India, and beyond them the dimly known regions of the yellow races. As a matter of history, Rome for many years feared trouble from that source. What had she to fear from the south? The Mediterranean protected her southern shores. What had she to fear from the north? The Alps Mountains stood there like sentinels on guard. Had she aught to fear from the west? The uncharted Atlantic was her protection. But from the east, where ambitious races lay, against whom nature had reared no barrier save a single narrow river, from that source Imperial Rome anticipated trouble, and she got it. The superstition current in John's day that Nero would one day return at the head of a Parthian army to overwhelm the empire merely reflected a popular dread of the east. John is doubtless taking advantage of this popular feeling of unrest and uncertainty. He is telling his readers that the one barrier that held back the hostile hordes would be removed and the kings from the sunrising would come unhampered as agents of divine judgment. As a matter of fact Rome was soon to be attacked from that direction, though she was finally overwhelmed, not from the east, but from the north.

There is this of permanent value in the vision, — when a nation rots at its heart and dies at its soul,

God always has in reserve some nation or nations ready to leap upon her. She ultimately becomes food for carrion beasts and birds of prey. We shall see more of that principle before we close our study of this interesting book.

The seventh angel poured his vial upon the air, and a voice cries, " It is finished." The arsenal of heaven is opened. Thunders roll, lightning crashes, hailstones fall weighing fifty pounds each; earthquakes shake down the mountains, and the islands are submerged. All the institutions of an orderly world disappear. Civilization goes down in a reign of terror. Everything rushes pellmell to destruction and men are left shelterless before the judgment throne of an offended God.

What was the moral reaction of men to these judgments? Just what it always has been, and is now. When kingdoms fall and thrones collapse, when dynasties totter to their ruin and the day is black with disaster, do men repent and turn to God the Lord? Did Egypt in Moses' day? Did Israel in Isaiah's day? Did Rome in Vandal days? Did France in the day of Napoleon's undoing? Any sign of repentance in Russia? Is Berlin doing penance? Hear you any deep-toned prophets in Germany calling the nation to its knees? None whatever. True to Apocalyptic form, in every doom's day, men still " gnaw their tongues " in agony, bite their lips in wrath, seal their doom in blasphemy, curse God and die. So it was on the Nile when the plagues fell. So it was on the Euphrates when the thunderbolts struck Babylon. So it was on the Tiber when the seven vials were emptied

on Rome. So it is on the Rhine to-day. When a nation has sinned away its day of grace, it finds no heart for repentance in a night of black disaster. There is a limit beyond which sin can not go without sealing its final doom. "My spirit shall not always strive with men." Now is the day of salvation. To-morrow may be too late.

XVI

WE STAND AT ARMAGEDDON

REVELATION 16:16

AND *they gathered them together into the place which is called in Hebrew Har-Magedon.* Rev. 16:16.

XVI

WE STAND AT ARMAGEDDON

REVELATION 16:16

THERE are certain words and phrases, certain signs and symbols, in the Revelation that have held, and still hold, a place in Christian thought out of all proportion to their importance. For some reason they have obtruded themselves like upstanding peaks in a mountain range. They have acted on certain minds like magic, and have given rise to weird interpretations, strange ideas, impossible theories. Barrels of midnight oil have been burned by eager students trying to find the beast whose number is " six hundred and sixty and six," or studying the battlefield of " Armageddon," or dissecting the meaning of " Mystical Babylon," or trying to locate in time the beginning of the " thousand years." Not because of the importance of these things to the Vision of St. John, but because of their prominence in Christian thought, they merit special attention in any study of the Apocalypse.

The term " Armageddon " has been given a curious meaning. It awakens in many minds a kind of superstitious dread of some awful crisis yet to come, they hardly know how or where or what, but a dreadful day that will make all other crises of history pale into insignificance. In order to get the meaning of this

magic word clearly before us let us try to locate Armageddon (1) in geography, (2) in history, (3) in prophecy, and (4) in actual experience.

First, then, *Armageddon in geography.* It is primarily a geographic term. Therefore, take down your map of the Holy Land and find Armageddon. It is not easy to locate; indeed you can not find it at all. It is not there. John manufactured the word. No other sacred writer uses it. It is a compound of two Hebrew words, "ar," mountain, and "Megiddo." It means literally the Mountain of Megiddo. It is a peak or section of a mountain range that runs northwest and southeast across Palestine between the Jordan and the Mediterranean. On the extreme northwest is Mount Carmel, at the southeast is Mount Gilboa, in the center is Mount Megiddo. To the north of the range is the Valley of Jezreel, drained by the River Kishon. To the south are the plains of Sharon. The center of that entire region of mountain, plain and valley, is Megiddo, "Armageddon."

Second, *Armageddon in history.* It was the blood-soaked battle-ground of Jewish history. It was there that Barak and Deborah with their ten thousand followers threw off the yoke of Canaanitish oppression by completely annihilating the armies of Sisera. It was there that Saul and Jonathan fought their last battle with the Philistines, and the field was first stained with the royal blood of Israel. There the relentless hand of Jehu caused the streams to run red with the blood of Joram, King of Israel, and Ahaziah, King of Judah; with the blood of Ahab and Jezebel and all their house, and all the priests of Baal. There

Elijah waged his unequal contest with the priests of Baal, cutting down four hundred and fifty false prophets. There the good King Josiah fell fighting the armies of Pharaoh-Necho as they marched on Assyria. At Armageddon, Israel achieved many of her greatest victories and suffered many of her most disastrous defeats. It was soaked with the best blood of Israel and the worst blood of Israel's enemies. If Belgium is the cockpit of Europe, Armageddon was the cockpit of that ancient world. One writer sums it up as follows: "Armageddon has been a chosen place of encampment in every contest carried on in Palestine from the days of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Assyria, to the disastrous march of Napoleon Bonaparte from Egypt to Syria. Jews, Gentiles, Saracens, Christian Crusaders and anti-Christian Frenchmen, Egyptians, Persians, Druses, Turks and Arabs, warriors of every nation under heaven, have pitched their tents on the plain of Esdraelon and have beheld their banners wet with the dews of the mountain."

What Marathon is in Greek history, what Austerlitz is in French history, what Sedan means to the history of Germany, what Waterloo is in English history, what Gettysburg is in American history — that was Armageddon in Israel's history.

Third, *Armageddon in prophecy*. When we speak of the word occurring in prophecy we mean particularly the prophecy of Revelation. The word is found nowhere else. What did it mean to John? How does he use the term? The only way to find out is to note carefully the passage in which the word occurs. Recall the situation that John describes when the seven

bowls of woe were poured upon the earth. What happened? When the just penalties of eternal law began to fall on a beastly government, on a false religion and corrupt society, when the foundations of the empire began to go to pieces and lightning struck the throne of civil authority, when all the institutions of civilization were fired by men's passions and society began to feel the terrors of social dissolution, when men "gnawed their tongues" in pain — what happened? Were men smitten in their consciences? Did they repent? Was there a revival of righteousness? Not at all. True to history, John pictures all the powers of evil rallying for the emergency and combining their forces for mutual defense.

The dragon and the two beasts, that is, Satan, Godless government and false religion, vomited forth three spirits of devils. Like "frogs" they hopped forth croaking their call throughout the world and gathering the forces of evil "for the war of the great day of the Lord," and they rallied their brood "in a place which is called in Hebrew Armageddon." It is a vision of the Kingdom of Darkness arrayed against the Kingdom of Light, and the field on which the contest is waged and the issues are settled is associated in John's mind with the historic battleground of Israel.

The careful reader of the chapter will ask three questions — (1) What do the three frogs represent? One writer believes that the three frogs are infidelity, Popery and Mohammedanism. Another is equally certain that they refer to Free Masonry, Popery and Mohammedanism. War sometimes does make strange bed-fellows, but these would be the strangest of all.

I haven't any doubt in my own mind that a blatant infidelity is the creation of the dragon, or that a domineering Popery is the offspring of the beast, or that Mohammed is a false prophet. But that the "three frogs" refer definitely to these things is quite beyond our imagination, and entirely beyond our understanding of John's Vision. The frogs are the spiritual progeny of the dragon and the beast and the false prophet. They symbolize a malignant devilish spirit, a hostile worldly power and a deceptive false religion, a sort of "hellish trinity" allied against God and the truth. It is as true now as when Paul first said it, "We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against the powers, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenlies."

While these three froglike spirits are rallying the hosts of evil, the forces of righteousness are not idle. They, too, are gathering for the war of the great day of God Almighty. The battle between good and evil is unescapable. Armageddon is inevitable.

(2) Where is Armageddon? We know where it is geographically and what it is historically, but what is it prophetically? Where will it be fought? Certainly not on any literal battlefield in the Holy Land. Armageddon on the map is no bigger than three ordinary townships. No intelligent person can believe that the great battle of the Kingdom of God will be concentrated in the Valley of Jezreel, on the slopes of Mount Megiddo. The field of Armageddon is nowhere; it is everywhere. That battlefield is the world.

(3) When will Armageddon be fought? Will you and I be there armed for the conflict? Certainly we

will. Indeed, unless we have lost our bearings, we are there now. There are not a few persons, and some of them diligent students of both sacred and profane history, who believe Armageddon will be a great final decisive battle fought sometime in the future, a great world conflict which will be pivoted on, though not confined to, the Valley of Jezreel. The other day I called at the office of a friend. Conversation drifted to matters social and religious. We fell to discussing the situation in Europe, its chaos, its welter, its bitter hates and apparently hopeless future. My friend was not optimistic. He did not believe civilization could ever right itself. He thinks we are moving rapidly toward the final crisis of history. "The Christ would have to come in power and glory. Armageddon must be fought and the battle may open sooner than we think." A great many devout Christians feel as my friend feels.

Just yesterday I picked up the morning paper and found a full-page advertisement, announcing that a certain celebrated lecturer, the champion of a certain religious sect with a not-too-enviable reputation, would speak this very afternoon in the Syria Mosque of Pittsburgh, and his theme would be "Armageddon." Here are the bold headlines of the startling announcement,

"ALL NATIONS MARCHING TO ARMAGEDDON"

"MILLIONS NOW LIVING WILL NEVER DIE"

"In a free lecture at the Syria Mosque, Sunday, Nov. —, ———— will prove by prophecy fulfilled and

in course of fulfillment that the greatest crisis of the ages is upon the world; that all nations are mustering their forces for the great battle of Armageddon foretold by the prophet of God; that the Lord will cut short the terrible conflict and millions now living will never die."

The purpose of this sermon would be entirely accomplished if a word could be spoken that would disillusion your minds of all that sort of thing. Let your intelligence fortify you against all such strained interpretations of Scripture. We need never expect the Kingdom of God to culminate some day in a sharp, fierce battle where the issues will be decided by sword and cannon shot. Armageddon will not be a single unprecedented battle of short duration. It is a war — a war age-long and world-wide, fought with moral and spiritual and intellectual weapons. It has been in progress for centuries and will continue for generations yet to come. In the progress of that war nations may rise against nations and kingdoms against kingdoms, and there may be famine and earthquake in divers places. These things are but incidents, episodes in that greater struggle which continues through the ages and will finally end in the complete triumph of light over darkness, truth over error, good over evil. There will be no armistice in that war, no resting on our arms while the leaders talk things over and come to terms; no opportunity to quibble about reparations. And there is no discharge in that war. It goes on night and day, and it will continue through the years until He comes whose right it is to reign.

John spoke of this age-long struggle between good and evil as Armageddon. How perfectly natural that he should do so. His birthplace was not far from historic Armageddon. His boyhood days were spent almost within sight of it. More than once had he tramped over the field. Many a day from his home in Galilee, he had looked toward the mountains where Gilboa, Megiddo and Carmel lifted their peaks toward the clouds. The history of that blood-stained field left its indelible mark on his youthful mind. What more natural than that he should speak of the world conflict between the Kingdom of Christ and the Kingdom of Darkness in terms of that historic field on which for centuries contending armies had fought back and forth and important issues were settled. In Hebrew it is " Armageddon," in Greek " Marathon," in French " Austerlitz," in English " Waterloo," in America " Gettysburg."

Fourth, *Armageddon is also an experience.* There is a sense in which every man's life is a miniature Armageddon. The battle is constantly being fought in men's souls. There comes a time in every man's life when dragon-like temptations leap to the attack, when passions struggle for the ascendency, when the question Whose man shall I be? must be answered. Jesus fought His Armageddon in the wilderness. The road to Damascus was Armageddon for Paul. Somewhere, sometime every man must fight his battle, and win or lose the citadel of his own soul.

It was June, 1912. The national Republican Convention was in session in Chicago. It was a crisis year for the party. The issue between opposing candidates

had torn the organization asunder. When on Saturday, Theodore Roosevelt arrived in the city, to personally direct the battle for his nomination, sluggish indifference fled like fog before the sun. Enthusiasm burst forth like a hot flame. Delegates rapidly found their respective camps. Monday evening came. The opposition was perfecting its plans to defeat the Colonel. He stood on the platform of the Auditorium, packed with loyal followers. He told them "they were engaged in a most solemn cause." He defied "the opposition as if it were a legion of evil spirits," and closed his "torrential speech" with words that will ring in the ears of every delegate as long as he lives. All the ardor of his fighting soul surging through his voice, he shouted, "*We stand at Armageddon and we battle for the Lord.*" And so stand we all. When the forces of evil and all the powers of darkness are howling for your undoing, let that word of a dauntless leader echo in your soul and let it stiffen your moral fiber. "We stand at Armageddon, and we battle for the Lord."

XVII

A WOMAN IN SCARLET

REVELATION 17:1–18

AND *he carried me away in the Spirit into a wilderness: and I saw a woman sitting upon a scarlet-coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having in her hand a golden cup full of abominations, even the unclean things of her fornication.*

XVII

A WOMAN IN SCARLET

REVELATION 17:1–18

THE Vision of John will reach a double climax in the remaining chapters. With the seventeenth chapter we are in the ascending foothills beyond which are the towering twin peaks of the Apocalypse. All the powers, forces and influences described under the symbols of the seven seals, the seven trumpets and the seven vials are hurrying to their goal — the consummation of Christian history. That goal, according to the vision of John, is the fall of Babylon and the rise of New Jerusalem.

To try to preach a so-called "practical sermon" from a chapter like this is to attempt the impossible. About all one can hope to accomplish is to throw out a few suggestions that may help to make the passage a little more intelligent to Bible readers. The chapter has been called a "twisted rope," a "tangled web." We shall probably not find it so difficult if we untwist the threads and unravel the web with the patience and painstaking care that any portion of Scripture merits.

The woman presented in this scene is a strange, repulsive creature. Her appearance betrays her. She is clothed in royal purple and shameless scarlet, bedecked with all the fineries of a woman of fashion, pearl necklaces, diamond rings, gold bracelets, glitter-

ing, bejeweled garments, — the gaudy, meretricious spoils of an unholy life. Her position is significant. She sits astride a fierce scarlet beast with seven heads and ten horns.

Three questions immediately confront us. First, Who is this woman? second, Who is the beast she rides? and third, What do those seven heads and ten horns symbolize? Thanks be to John for hinting the answers. Remembering how Jesus would sometimes take the disciples aside to explain a parable, John immediately proceeds to interpret the vision:

I. Who is the woman in scarlet? On her forehead is written, " Mystery, Babylon the great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth." Her corrupt rule extends over peoples, multitudes, nations and tongues. She is drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. The kings of earth are the easy victims of her allurements. The woman is " the great city which reigneth over the kings of the earth."

Can there be any doubt that the woman represents Pagan Rome? But which Rome? There were as many Romes within Rome as there are New Yorks within New York. There is commercial New York, political New York, social New York, fashionable New York, religious New York; New York the center of art and education, and the New York of many tongues and peoples. The scarlet woman represents Rome, not as a military or a commercial or a political power, but as the center of a corrupt faith, the mother of a false religion, wielding an idolatrous influence over cities and nations, and sponsoring fierce religious persecutions. That the woman represents the idolatrous reli-

gion of pagan Rome, is apparent from two considerations:

There are three notable women in the Revelation. Each represents something religious. The sun-crowned woman of the twelfth chapter is a symbol of the church as the mother of Jesus. The bride of the Lamb in the twenty-first chapter is the church redeemed and purified. The scarlet woman of the seventeenth chapter represents the religious power of Rome. There are two notable cities in John's vision, Mystic Babylon and New Jerusalem. The bride of the Lamb, the church of Christ, is the very life and center of New Jerusalem. An adulterous woman, that is, a false religion is primarily responsible for the depraved life, the baneful influence of Babylon.

The relation between Jehovah and the Old Testament church is repeatedly set forth under the figure of husband and wife. The relation between Christ and the New Testament church is illustrated under the figure of bride and groom. Wherever and whenever the church becomes degenerate, whether in the Old Testament or in the New; wherever men transferred their faith from God to idolatry, such apostasy was constantly spoken of as spiritual adultery. Precisely what you have here — the false religion of Rome is a woman in scarlet. She becomes the center of a vicious contagion, the cause of apostasy, "the mother of abominations."

II. Who is the scarlet beast? It is the sea-born beast of the thirteenth chapter with the same seven heads and ten horns. The beast represents an organized political power, an anti-Christian world empire,

founded on the right of might. In John's day the beast was political and military Rome; in Luther's day it was political and ecclesiastical Rome. In our own day, we have seen the beast mirrored in the wild ravings of Nietzsche and Bernhardi. When the scarlet beast emerged again in the German Empire of the twentieth century, he had lost none of his original fierceness.

The main thing in this chapter is the vision of the woman in scarlet sitting astride a scarlet-colored beast. The symbol embodies a principle which is not a dead issue even to-day. It flashes a warning in scarlet letters, a warning that has been repeatedly emphasized in the history of the world. If we get that lesson, it will be enough. We need not bother about the remaining details of the chapter.

It would only confuse the main lesson to argue the meaning of the seven heads and ten horns. Some will tell you that the seven heads refer to seven emperors, five of whom were dead and gone, the sixth, Domitian, was then on the throne, and the seventh was yet to come. I am not prepared to affirm or deny that the eighth verse mirrors a popular superstition about Nero. It is claimed by others that the seven heads symbolize seven great world empires, each of which in turn embodied the spirit of the beast: Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Greece, five of them, had passed away; the sixth, Pagan Rome, was then in power; the seventh, Papal Rome, was yet to come and would rise out of the ruins of ancient Rome. Without pausing to discuss the relative merits of these theories, let it be marked in either case that a king or a kingdom, laws or law

makers, rulers and empires that leave God out of the reckoning are heading for foul weather such as overwhelmed mystical Babylon.

The ten horns without doubt refer to the provinces and dependent states over which Rome ruled with an iron hand through her consuls and pro-consuls. For years the Roman provinces joined heartily with the central power in her effort to suppress the followers of Christ. They all made "war on the Lamb." As a matter of fact, as John suggests, the horns of these dependent peoples finally turned on Rome and rent her to pieces.

But let us forget the seven heads and ten horns. They are subordinate to the main vision. The scarlet woman on the scarlet beast is central. Who or what does John have in mind? The thing that has utterly confused our understanding of John's Vision and has made the Revelation seem to many persons an impossible book, has been the persistent effort of a certain school of interpreters to make its symbols and figures refer to certain definite persons and events in history. The result has been chaos. The Revelation has been treated like an old family album full of ancestral photographs. The task of the interpreter, therefore, is merely to take this book to the graveyards of history where personages, kings, empires and events lie buried, and select therefrom the particular person or historic circumstance that most nearly resembles the picture under review. If one fails to find a suitable person or event for a certain picture in the album, the conclusion is that that person or event is yet to come. The confusing fact is, however, that there have been

many persons and events in history like those John describes. I have read this past week page after page in more than one volume, many of them printed in fine six-point type, read until my brain reeled and my eyes blurred on the page, books in which the authors set forth with remarkable accuracy and exhaustive detail how the seventeenth chapter of Revelation has been literally fulfilled in the history of Papal Rome.

All that sort of thing is contrary to our understanding of the Apocalypse. It is not a prophetic chronology of history. It is not given to a discussion of definite persons and concrete events. It is a dramatic portrayal of movements and principles, of great historic forces and tendencies that were asserting themselves in John's day and in Rome's day, and have continued to operate every day since.

You will find the seventeenth chapter of Revelation not only illustrated but fulfilled, again and again, wherever in history a false, apostate religion has sat astride a corrupt political power, holding the bridle reins of civil government and riding roughshod over all opposition toward its worldly goal.

The symbol was fulfilled in John's day when the religion of emperor worship sat astride a beastly government and set out to exterminate the followers of Christ. It was fulfilled again in the days of the false prophet when Mahomet climbed on the back of civil government and, unsheathing his sword, attempted to ride roughshod over all Christendom. It was realized again in the history of Papal arrogance when an apostate church, personified in the Pope, climbed into the saddle and held the bridle reins of civil authority.

She was the woman in scarlet riding the beast of worldly power, ruling over nations and peoples and tongues, and drunk with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus. True to the vision of the ten horns that finally turned to rend the scarlet woman, it was the Fredericks of Germany, the Henrys of England, the Louises of France, the Victor Emmanuels of Italy, the very kings and states whom Papal Rome had enticed and ruled for generations, that finally turned and rent all political power from her ambitious hand.

The woman in scarlet again rode the scarlet beast when in England the established church merged with the imperial government and tried to compel religious uniformity throughout the realm by forcing her liturgy and prayer-book down the throats of all Protestants. And again in Scotland, when the established Presbyterian church arrogated to herself civil authority and tried to force her forms and creeds on all. If you go back far enough in history, tracing the roots of the United Presbyterian church to its mother soil in Scotland, you will find that your church had its beginnings in a hot protest and a stubborn resistance against a scarlet woman astride a scarlet beast. The blood of Covenanters is in our veins.

The marriage of church and state, the union of religion and politics, has never been a wholesome thing for either one. Wherever they have been confederate, it has always meant corruption for the state and degeneracy for religion. I know of no exceptions to that. "When in the course of human events" a new nation was being born in a new world, a constitutional convention composed of far-seeing men who knew

thoroughly well the political and ecclesiastical history of the continent, laid this down as a foundation stone, "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." That plank is spiked to the mast of the ship of state. It can never be torn loose. We shall never have a church-ridden state nor a state-ridden church on this continent. Protestant America can never be shaken from the conviction that the two must be kept forever separate. I do not know of any Protestant church in America that fails to see that. None see it more clearly or believe it more profoundly than churches of the Presbyterian persuasion.

Whenever a church forgets her high office of spiritual supremacy and begins to covet worldly power and to reach forth her hand for the control of government — look out! That church is turning down a road at the other end of which is a woman in scarlet sitting astride a scarlet beast.

XVIII

BABYLON IS FALLEN

REVELATION 18:1–24

AND *he cried with a mighty voice, saying, Fallen, fallen is Babylon the great, and is become a habitation of devils, and a hold of every unclean spirit and a hold of every unclean and hateful bird.* Rev. 18:2.

XVIII

BABYLON IS FALLEN

REVELATION 18:1–24

EVERY generation has its seers. They have eyes that see, ears that hear and minds that sense the future. They know their own times thoroughly well. They do not confuse things temporal with things eternal. They discern the drifts, the tendencies, the currents and counter currents of their own day, and by a kind of spiritual intuition foresee the issues of to-morrow. They are the statesmen of whom no generation ever has too many.

During those deeply shadowed days and bloody years between 1914 and 1918, there were few great souls in England, or in France, or in America who did not feel all the time that the Central Powers would fall. No matter how immense her resources or how perfect or unbeatable her military machine, Germany was doomed. Even when the Allied cause seemed most hopeless and the night pressure was heaviest, amid thick darkness, men still voiced their Faberian faith, singing:

> *"Right is right since God is God,*
> *And right the day must win."*

When on a bright autumn morning five years ago the daily papers of the world flashed the news in bold

headlines, "Germany Surrenders," it was but the realization of that which the seers saw and the prophets predicted all along.

In the preceding chapters on the Revelation, the seer has been observing the unfoldings of history, he has been following the age-long struggle between good and evil, between the Kingdom of the Dragon and the Kingdom of the Lamb, two antagonistic forces symbolized by Babylon, the city of sin, and the New Jerusalem, the city of God. He is never in doubt about the final issue. So sure is he of the outcome that he can already see the flashing headlines "Babylon is Fallen," and knows exactly how the sensational news would be written up in the columns of the morning paper. What we have, therefore, in this chapter is the description of an event which to John's mind was future, but written up like a perfect piece of journalism reporting what happened yesterday. No Philip Gibbs or Irvin Cobb could write a better news column. It rivets attention. Like Hugo's narrative of Waterloo, like Carlyle's description of the fall of Paris, you can not lay it aside until you have finished it.

Taking the chapter as it stands it is an answer to two questions: (1) What led to the fall of mystic Babylon? (2) How were men affected by the crash? How did people feel about it? What were their moral and social reactions?

What caused Babylon to fall? Three sins were at bottom responsible.

The first was Pride of Power. She "glorified herself" — "herself," mind you. She said in her heart, "I am a queen," the mistress of the world, and "shall

in no wise see mourning." You may read it in the story of Nineveh in Belshazzar's day, in the story of Babylon in Nebuchadnezzar's day, in the story of Rome in Caesar's day, in the history of Papal Rome in mediaeval days, in the life of France in Napoleon's day, and of Germany in the Kaiser's day. Read what? This truth of holy writ, "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." "And what doth the Lord require of thee," O self-sufficient America, "but to do justly, love mercy and walk humbly with thy God?"

A second vice that bit into her moral fiber was Pride of Wealth. She revelled in her merchandise of gold and silver and precious stones. She laid tribute on the world for her supply of metal, ivory and precious wood. She smelled to heaven with her spices and ointments, her perfumes and cosmetics. She lived in the delectable mountains of material prosperity and foolishly thought that the selfish enjoyment of her luxuries was the be-all and the end-all of life. May those who have ears to hear, hear what the voice of Patmos saith to the cities.

A third proof that she was ready for the "wine-press of the wrath of God" was her Inhumanity to Man, her utter disregard of human life. Not only was her career stained with the blood of innumerable martyrs, she made commerce of slaves and did not scruple to traffic in the souls of men and of women. That is the brief, chaste, reserved record of the aged seer, but profane history tells the story in bolder strokes, how whole armies of men were marched into the slaughter pens of endless wars and meaningless

battles, how Christians and criminals were tortured in the arenas to amuse holiday crowds, how souls were trampled underfoot of passion, how empresses like Messalina and Agrippina, wives of the Emperor Claudius, compelled the ladies of the empire to submit openly to nameless vices in the very courts of the Caesars, — those who objected too strenuously were led forth to the tune of the death march. Human life was a thing to be toyed with, trampled upon, ruthlessly destroyed, if only the machine of a decadent civilization could be kept going.

Life was cheap in mystic Babylon, cheaper than in our stockyards, cheaper than in New York when Riis and Roosevelt tore down the rattletrap tenements; cheaper than in Chicago or St. Louis or San Francisco where the traffic in women flourishes with the nicety of a modern industry. Life was cheap in mystic Babylon, cheaper than it was the other day to a dumb, dull, depraved father in Pittsburgh who sold his twelve-year-old daughter to another man for two thousand dollars; cheaper than it is in America with its rapidly increasing murder rate; cheaper than it is on our speedways where holocausts of life are needlessly and recklessly sacrificed every week of every year.

It is an important question of criticism — What city does mystic Babylon represent? It is a far more important question — Is America being Babylonized? To what extent is our pride of power, our love of wealth and luxury, and the fearful cheapening of human life eating away the moral fiber of the nation? Does some one think that the Apocalypse has no bear-

ing on, and no message for present-day life? Let him read the eighteenth chapter alone. It sounds like a warning issued this very morning to any city or state or civilization that revels wantonly in its luxuries, places the question of "livings" above life and puts the almighty dollar on the throne and calls it God. Remember,

"Once Babylon, by beauty tended,
In pleasure palaces and walks of pride,
Like a great scarlet flower, reared its head,
Drank in the sun, laughed, smiled and died."

The chapter answers a second significant question — *How were men affected by the fall of Babylon?* What reactions did they experience? How did men feel about it? John tells us the collapse of the city broke men's hearts. They wailed and wept for Babylon. But why did they mourn? That is the question. It is not, did men cry? but, why did they cry? How completely Babylon had lost her soul in those degenerate days is tragically illustrated in the miserable wailings of three groups. The kings, the ruling classes, cried, "Woe, woe, the great city, Babylon, the strong city." They mourned because her material glory and power were gone. The merchants, the bankers, the brokers, the bondholders and traders wept because their markets were ruined. The ship owners, whose sails dotted the seas, carrying the rich cargoes of Babylon's commerce, broke their hearts because the tidal wave had submerged their principal port. Where were the patriots who mourned for the soul of the nation?

Do you recall how the exiled Jews were affected by

the fall of Jerusalem? In their dreams by night they saw Zion in all her former glory; and in their visions by day they saw the city a heap of ruins, the habitation of bats and owls and jackals. Gathering in groups on the banks of the Euphrates, they hung their harps on the weeping willows, and refused to sing their religious hymns and patriotic songs. But one song they never ceased singing, "If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget its cunning and let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." The soul of the Hebrew people had not perished when Jerusalem fell in ruins. Because their love of home continued and their faith in Jehovah persisted, God sent them back to their native land, the city was rebuilt and the nation restored. Recall also that Jesus one day sat on the Mount of Olives, and, seer that He was, saw Jerusalem tottering once more to her ruin. The bitter tears He wept were the tears of a patriot who loved Jerusalem as you love America.

How utterly different the emotions of these degenerate princelings and profiteering merchants and ship owners when mystic Babylon fell. Analyze their tears and you will find no trace of patriotism, no love of home or native land. The national soul of Babylon was dead. When the fire destroyed their glittering mansion and the earthquake shook down their piled-up wealth and luxuries, they mourned over the ruins of their material prosperity, but cared not a fig for the life that was once resident in the structure.

Finally, *What city does mystic Babylon represent?* What city does John have in mind? Can we locate it? I take this seventeenth chapter of the Revelation and

walk back through the years visiting the ruins of history. I go back to Genesis and look upon Sodom, and conclude that mystic Babylon was Sodom. I listen to Nahum's prophecy against Nineveh and say, mystic Babylon was Nineveh. I read Jeremiah's description of ancient Babylon and try to discover mystic Babylon on the banks of the Euphrates. I listen to Ezekiel heralding the doom of Tyre, rich and powerful, commanding the trade routes of the world, and I conclude that mystic Babylon was Tyre. I turn to profane history and read of Papal Rome in the days of its apostasy, when it waxed arrogant and wanton, revelling in luxury and wealth, and I feel almost certain that mystic Babylon was mediaeval Rome. I read the story of Florence in the days of Lorenzo de Medici, rich, brilliant, gay, powerful, when Savonarola's voice broke into its merriment like the voice of thunder, pronouncing her doom unless she repented, and I wonder whether mystic Babylon was not Florence. Again I take down my "Les Miserables" and read Victor Hugo's fearful indictment of the social life of France, or I pick up Carlyle's "French Revolution," and conclude that mystic Babylon is a synonym for debauched Paris one hundred and twenty-five years ago. Or I visit London with its pride of power and pride of wealth, saying in her heart, "I am a queen, I rule the waters," and I wonder whether London may yet become mystic Babylon. I go to New York, with its Babel of tongues, a city in which is concentrated all that is worst (as well as much of that which is best) in American civilization. If government is corrupt in other cities, it is worse in New York. If society is

gay and brilliant elsewhere, it is more so in New York. If other cities exert power and influence, New York outreaches them all. If the civilization of America ever breaks down, it will break down first in New York. One can not walk down Broadway at night with its gay life and glittering lights without wondering whether the great metropolis is not after all the perfect type of the mystic city of John's vision.

Hear me! One can afford to be absolutely dogmatic at this point. Mystic Babylon is any city or state or civilization that becomes Babylonized. The fall of Babylon is not only a description of the fall of Babylonized Rome, it is typical of the overthrow of any civilization in which religion becomes degenerate, government corrupt and social life decadent.

The most profitable thing any reader can do with this chapter is to take it as a lamp with which to search the soul of America. I listened the other evening to a timely address by a man who for twelve consecutive years has served as the District Attorney of a certain county in Western Pennsylvania. The facts produced from the court records of his own county and from his own personal experience as a prosecuting attorney were a fearful indictment of the currents in American life that are heading for the gulf. He spoke of our murder records mounting skyward, of the fostering of bitter class hatreds, of the constant flooding of the country with anarchistic propaganda, of the popular disregard for laws that men find inconvenient to obey, of the degrading criminal influence of a certain class of moving pictures that go unchallenged in all our communities, of the misuse and abuse of the

automobile as a convenient vehicle for wolflike passions to hurry their sometimes too willing victims to moral death valleys and then hurry them back again before any one suspects that the white flower of innocence has withered by the wayside. Where are the guardians of the law who patrol our highways? Our State Police should plant a sign in every side lane of the country, "No parking here after night." Read again your "Quo Vadis." It is an indictment of the social life of mystic Babylon, a civilization in which the moral decencies of life were openly flouted. Read your "Quo Vadis" and ask yourself whether the demoralizing currents of life are not Babylonizing America to-day. If to ask such a question in the pulpit brands a preacher as an alarmist or a pessimist, so be it. He may be a dreamer, as he ought to be, though he need not be and ought not to be a pious fool, blissfully ignorant of the cold facts of life.

As we listened to the address, we thought of the crack in old Liberty Bell and how it continues to widen with the years, and wondered — wondered how long that old emblem of the "land of the free and the home of the brave" could hold together, and how many generations would pass before history should write again, "Fallen! fallen is Babylon the Great."

"Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget."

XIX

THE TWO SUPPERS

REVELATION 19:1–21

LET *us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto Him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. . . . And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are true words of God.* Rev. 19:7, 9.

AND I *saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the birds that fly in mid heaven, Come and be gathered together unto the great supper of God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses and of them that sit thereon, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, and small and great.* Rev. 19:17, 18.

XIX

THE TWO SUPPERS

REVELATION 19:1–21

IN our first lecture, when discussing the general scope and plan of the Apocalypse, the statement was made that there is not a paragraph in the entire book, not a voice in the entire drama, not a note in any of its seven anthems, that does not fit into the author's purpose to strengthen the souls and stiffen the morale of suffering, discouraged Christians. How perfectly clear is that purpose in the passage now before us. If in what is said this morning I could make you feel even a little of what those early Christians felt who first listened to the hallelujah choras of this chapter, you would not soon forget this sermon.

There are two scenes in the chapter and they are strikingly contrasted. It is a painting on a single canvas of two suppers, the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, and the Great Supper of God. A heavenly light, wonderful, mystic, shines on the one; the other is deeply shadowed in gloom. The guests at the one are "four living creatures," "four and twenty elders," and a great multitude robed in garments of white; the guests at the other are carrion beasts and scavenger birds. There is music at the one, singing by a heavenly choir, hallelujah songs like the voice of many waters; at the

other there is no music, no singing, only wails and groans and crunching bones.

The Marriage Supper of the Lamb is a wonder scene. Missionaries tell us that a wedding feast is still the great social event in the East, as it was in Bible times. Even with us here in the West it is the climax of happy events. In the Vision of John, the " marriage supper " signalizes the happy consummation of Christ's Kingdom.

The bridegroom is the Lamb of God. The bride is the redeemed church. Like the bride of all time in all lands, she is robed in the pure white of truth and purity, the fine linen of righteousness and holiness. It is hard not to think of the church as a building or an organism, something local, tangible, visible. But such is not the church of John's Vision. The church of the Revelation is the " holy catholic church " of the Apostles' Creed, a redeemed society with Christ at its center.

A long time the bridegroom has wooed his bride, loving her, pleading with her, even shedding his blood for her. But the bride has had other suitors. The sea-born beast tried to win her submission by threats. The false prophet tried to entice her with worldly promises. A trinity of villains, the world, the flesh and the devil, had tried by every conceivable art to win her hand. The dragon dogged her footsteps through the years. Sometimes, as in John's day and Jeremiah's day, and Papal days and other days, it seemed as though the world would cause her to utterly break her engagement to be faithful and true. But looking down the years John sees a wedding, and understands that " He that

hath the bride is the bridegroom." When he said at length, "Lovest thou me more than these?" she answered, "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." John knew that love would win; it always wins where true hearts are engaged.

What is that picture of the Marriage Supper of the Lamb? Can we translate it into something real, actual? It is simply, yet profoundly, a vision of the final and perfect union of Christ with His Church. The most sacred bond of love that binds two hearts into one seemed to John barely adequate to illustrate the eternal oneness in which God and redeemed humanity would one day be united in Christ. It is the vision of an event far off in time. It is still future. The perfecting of the church, the robing of the children of God, the making ready of the bride, is still going on. How long the preparation must continue no one can tell, but some day the marriage will be consummated. With the sensitive ears of a prophet, John hears the ringing of the wedding bells down the years, the playing of the wedding march, the voices of a great multitude singing, "Hallelujah! Hallelujah!" Four times the hallelujah chorus bursts on John's ears like the thunder of the ocean.

Songs are appreciated only when the words of the song are heard and understood. Listen to the words of the wedding song they sing, "Hallelujah; salvation, and glory, and honor, and power, unto the Lord our God. For true and righteous are His judgments: for he hath judged the great harlot, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand."

"Hallelujah, Amen. The Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Let us be glad and rejoice and give honour to Him for the marriage of the Lamb is come. . . ." Two major notes of joy are struck in the song. One was prompted by the triumph of the redeemed church, the other by the righteous judgments that had fallen on Babylon, avenging the blood of the saints on the harlot city of sin.

How could heaven find voice for such a note of joy? In these soft, sentimental days would not John be regarded as a semi-pagan to imagine a thing like that? Like what? Why, that the redeemed in glory exult with hallelujah songs over the ruins of earth and the wails of men. My brother, when a question like that arises in connection with any passage of Scripture, it is time to put on your thinking cap. Be careful to keep your colors from blending, and the lines of thought from tangling. The wails of earth never awaken the harps of heaven. Be perfectly sure of that. A true Christian who knows his Lord never rejoices over the sufferings of his fellows, no matter though they were his enemies. A hymn of praise is never a hymn of hate. Remember that. But remember this also: There are matters immensely more important than the misery or the happiness of individuals. It is indeed a bitter thing to hear the groans of kings and the wails of merchants and ship owners. It is a bitter thing to see a man or a woman in tears; but it would be a fearful thing if men could travel unchallenged the criminal path of rebellion against justice and truth and moral decency, and never be called to

account. That would mean the end of the moral government of God.

Heaven has sympathy with men, but no sympathy with sin. Heaven has pity for souls duped into a beastly life, but no pity for the beast. There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, and there is joy in heaven when righteousness and justice have been vindicated, and truth goes marching on. When Moses and the Children of Israel stood on the banks of the Red Sea and sang, "The Lord hath triumphed gloriously"; when Deborah and Barak stood on the banks of the Kishon and sang, "O, my soul, march on with strength . . . let thine enemies perish, O Lord"; when the great white throng stood at the marriage feast of the Lamb and sang, "Hallelujah! for true and righteous are His judgments," they did what you and I do when we stand and sing "The Battle Hymn of the Republic,"

"Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord;
He is trampling out his vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored;
He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible, swift sword;
His truth is marching on,"

and somehow we cannot feel that we do wrong to sing the song.

The second scene, in sharp contrast to the first, is the *Great Supper of God.*

It is a strange, weird feast that follows the great war of God Almighty. Make haste slowly here. Do

not hurry past this scene. There is something here for present-day thinkers to ponder. The guests are carrion beasts and birds of prey. They gorge themselves on the flesh of despotic kings, military captains and mighty warriors; they eat the flesh of army horses, and pick the bones of armored riders. Need we pause to interpret the vision? John lived in an age cursed above all ages with militarism. Every free man carried an imperial soldier on his back, sometimes two or three. Civilization was crushed with its weight of arms. The religion of Christ was fettered by martial law. Churches were burned, Christians were imprisoned, exiled, beheaded, nailed on cross-beams, and put to the sword — all by military authority. If God were in His heavens and Christ on His throne, such a civilization could not endure forever — though it lasted longer than John ever dreamed. What he sees in vision is a "Great Supper of God" at which the Nemesis of civilization is destroyed, oppressive arms are scrapped, and the spirit of militarism is annihilated. The preparation of the world for that "supper" would be a long historic process, as long as the preparation of the bride for the wedding supper, longer than John thought. As a prophet, he does not bother about periods of time. He sees events, and does not care about distances. He knows the goal, for he knows the power at work.

John sees heaven opened, as it was opened when Christ came to earth. A conqueror rides forth on a white horse. He has diadems on his brow, eyes that flash fire, a sword in his mouth that searches out individuals and nations, and cuts to the center of civili-

zations. He wears neither the blue nor the gray. His uniform is white, pure white, sprinkled with blood. An innumerable host of soldiers mounted on white horses follow him.

As we stand on the avenue and see the procession go by, curiosity gets the better of us. We can not help asking the seer some questions. Then tell us, John, who is this white rider? Why, don't you know? He is called "Faithful and True," "Word of God," "King of Kings and Lord of Lords." Any other title, John? Yes, another name that pen could not frame nor tongue pronounce, a title that meant "Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Prince of Peace." And whither goes he as he rides forth? He is marching as to war, going to tread "the winepress of the wrath of God." Upon whom has he declared war? On the beast and the false prophet, on oppressive government and false religion and on all men and institutions corrupted by them. It is the King of Kings riding forth to Armageddon. You will look in vain for any Red Horse of war, or Black Horse of famine, or Pale Horse of Pestilence following this White Horse of Conquest. The weapons of the Kingdom of God are not carnal, they are spiritual. "Peter, put up thy sword."

And how will the battle end? Tell us that. Everybody wants to know. But John does not tell us how it *will* end; he tells us how it *has* ended. He does not wait for the slow-moving centuries to reveal the issue. He does not have to — he is a seer. With the wings of vision he leaps across millenniums — how far he has traveled down the vistas of time, he does not know — but standing at the end of the age, he sees "The

Great Supper of God," where all worldly powers like imperial Rome and all false religions like emperor worship are annihilated. The last battle for the liberty of the sons of God has been fought. The struggle is over. The victory is won. The millennium is at hand. Just across the hill is New Jerusalem, the city of God.

One more word in closing. When God prepares a supper he always invites guests — " Blessed are they which are bidden to the marriage supper of the Lamb." An angel from heaven voices that, and an angel standing in the scorching sun issues this, " Come and be gathered together unto the Great Supper of God." Every man must accept one or the other of these two invitations. So must every church or community or state or nation. All will be guests at one or the other of two suppers. Those who accept the invitation to " the Marriage Supper of the Lamb " will live in the City of God. Those who reject it go ultimately to the " Great Supper of God."

A few years ago, some prophet with a commanding voice, a Luther or Goethe, should have thundered the message of the 19th chapter of Revelation into the soul of Germany before her military captains, her army horses and armored riders became carrion for others to feast on. To which supper is Russia going — or has she arrived? And France? If she would only loose her fingers from the throat of her prostrate foe long enough to answer the question — Whither? What about Italy, hungry for power, feverishly in haste to grasp everything in sight, talking loosely about her just obligations to creditor nations? And criminal Turkey, meet for the " great supper of God," once

more escaping through the back door while judge and jurors quarrel in the front yard of Europe? And thou, America, whose "rocks and rills and templed hills" we love, to which "supper" art thou going? No man knows; she has not yet given her final answer. What we do know is that America will build her soul on the ethics of the Sermon on the Mount, clothe herself in the white of truth and righteousness, and rejoice at the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, or drunk with power, and pride and wealth, she will one day stagger to the Great Supper of God. We have no mortgage on the will of God. We are not immune to the penalties of moral law. The King of Kings on His white mount rides on. Those who follow Him move toward the security of the City of God. Those who refuse must finally go down with the city of sin. We stand at Armageddon.

XX

THE MILLENNIUM

REVELATION 20:1–15

AND *they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.*
Rev. 20:4.

XX

THE MILLENNIUM

REVELATION 20:1–15

TO preach one sermon, and only one, on a chapter like the twentieth of Revelation, and to say in that one sermon everything that needs to be said, would be a task from which the Angel Gabriel might shrink. For an ordinary minister to attempt it in an ordinary pulpit at an ordinary service would be regarded by some as a piece of sheer homiletic madness. Whether your pastor is really mad or just foolish, wise or otherwise, the fact remains that the task confronts us this morning and is unavoidable.

In the course of our journey through the troubled waters of Revelation we have arrived at a point where the depth, if not fathomless, is at least debatable. It is the fighting chapter of the book, a bone of contention between Christians who hold utterly diverse views regarding its meaning.

There are passages in the Apocalypse which one may think to ignore on the supposition that they are beyond our understanding or contain nothing of value for our day. You can not so regard the twentieth chapter. No other passage in the book has been so sharply disputed, and no other has taken a deeper hold on the mind of present day Christendom. What you find in this chapter will determine whether you shall pitch

your tent in the camp of pre-millenarianism or of post-millenarianism. Between the two there is a wide difference. The real lines of cleavage running through Christendom to-day are not denominational lines. There are no longer any vital differences between Protestant churches. In the main, there are only three sharp lines of doctrinal difference. One separates between Romanism and Protestantism; another cleaves between " fundamentalism " and " liberalism "; a third divides pre-millenarians from post-millenarians. These lines of cleavage are not mere surface cracks. Each is a deep fissure, a wide crevasse. Strange as it may seem, post-millenarians and pre-millenarians divide mainly on the question of interpreting the twentieth chapter of Revelation. I am sure that peace-loving John never dreamed how his readers would quarrel over the contents of this chapter. They never did until centuries after John was dead and gone.

Before we proceed let us again make sure of two things, namely, the spiritual purpose and the literary form of the Apocalypse. Bear in mind that the Revelation is neither history nor " prophecy," so-called. It is not a prose essay, nor a mathematical treatise. It is a dramatic portrayal of Christian history. It is spiritual truth stated in symbol and figure. Remember also — and let us insist on it — John was writing to Christians whose ranks were being rapidly depleted by persecution. Multitudes had already suffered martyrdom. Every passage in the book dovetails into his major purpose to strengthen and encourage disciples in a day of bitter ordeal. He is all the time trying to say something that tried Christians needed

to have said. The twentieth chapter is no exception. The dramatic form and spiritual purpose of the Apocalypse is nowhere better illustrated than in this chapter. It is one of the most dramatic passages in the book, and it was written to inspire the souls of oppressed Christians.

There are four scenes presented in the chapter. As the curtain rings up, the first scene is the *Chaining of the Dragon.* An angel descends from heaven with a great chain in one hand and the keys of the abyss in the other. He lays hold of the dragon, fetters him, throws him bodily into the pit, clamps down the lid, seals it shut, and shut it remains for a thousand years. Is the writer portraying literal fact or is it truth stated in the form of drama?

John was a Jew, but to a degree a Grecianized Jew. He lived in a Greek world and used the Greek language. Ancient Greece was the classical home of the drama. She taught the world the use of that form of literature. In a certain Greek drama written by Aeschylus four hundred years before John wrote the Apocalypse, there occurs a scene which almost exactly parallels the opening scene of this chapter. So striking is the similarity that one can not help wondering whether John had read " Prometheus Bound." Prometheus is a demi-god of Greek mythology. He offends the gods by stealing fire from the Temple of Zeus and teaching its use to man. As punishment for teaching man how to use

> *" . . . the bright glory*
> *Of fire that all arts spring from,"*

Zeus commands

> *" To bind this crafty trickster fast in chains*
> *Of adamantine bonds that none can break."*

With chains about his arms and limbs and an adamantine wedge driven through his bosom, he is riveted to a rock for ten thousand years, and is finally released from torment by the strong hands of Hercules.

No one has ever thought of taking the story of Prometheus literally. It is a drama embodying a moral truth. And if anyone insists on interpreting this twentieth chapter of the Apocalypse literally, then literal he must be from beginning to end. The angel, the dragon, the chains, the keys, the abyss and the thousand years must all be taken literally. No intelligent person reads it so. It is a picture of spiritual truth. What John is trying to say is that the dragon himself, all satanic power and influence, would finally be put in restraint by the bonds of the gospel of Christ.

What did we see in the last chapter? We saw the beast and the false prophet captured and Babylon destroyed. But what about the dragon? Not a word there about " that old serpent." He apparently escaped the conquering crusaders. When the 19th chapter closes, the devil is still at large, and just so long as he is at liberty to roam about like a roaring lion, so long as sin and lust and passion continue in the heart of mankind, the dragon will build other Babylons and breathe falseness into other prophets. You have not destroyed the devil when you have destroyed the works of the devil. To the undimmed vision of the seer it is clear that the Evangel of the Gospel would not only

destroy the works of the devil but would put the very spirit of evil under bonds.

Those early Christians needed to know that, and we need to know it. You have not conquered sin when you have destroyed the works of sin. Elijah may wreck the altars of Baal and kill the false prophets, and Jehu may utterly destroy the political power of Ahab and Jezebel, but until the heart of the nation no longer lusts after idolatry the altars of Baal will rise again. You may destroy slavery as an institution, but the victory is not complete until you have destroyed the desire for slaves and have persuaded men that slavery is wrong. You may pass laws to restrain criminals and fill your jails and penitentiaries with law breakers, but criminals will be with us still until their dispositions have been altered. You may close the saloon by law and dismantle the breweries and distilleries, but until you have cured men of the burning appetite, the curse of alcoholism will remain in one form or another. You may burn down the houses of ill fame and legislate against white slavery — that is work for the police and legislative bodies — but the evil will not be cured until lust is cured and virtue is enthroned in the heart of man, and that is the work of the church.

Napoleon kept Europe in a state of turmoil for two decades, and the devil has kept the world in turmoil for uncounted millenniums. What are you going to do about it? You may whip Napoleon at Leipsic and give him a free excursion to Elba and then sit down at the peace table to divide the spoils, but before you rise from your conference at Vienna the Nemesis of

Europe will be back on your hands again. You may whip him once more at Waterloo and utterly crush his army, but not until you have chained him on St. Helena is Europe safe.

That is John's message. It will be St. Helena for the dragon, the abyss for the devil. The very spirit of sin and evil will be restrained by gospel chains for a thousand years, that is, for a long, indefinite period.

When the curtain rings up a second time the scene is the *Reign of the Martyred Saints*.

Every person who owns a Bible, and reads it, should blue pencil verses 4, 5 and 6. Not another passage in the New Testament is given greater prominence in current religious discussions. It is the bedrock on which pre-millenarianism plants its faith. These three verses furnish the major ground for a millennial scheme which teaches that the gospel of Christ, with its story of Bethlehem, its ethics and miracles, with its Mount of Transfiguration, its Gethsemane, Calvary, empty tomb and Pentecost, can never save this world. It was never intended to do so. The gospel dispensation will fail as the Mosaic dispensation failed. The world will grow worse and worse until Christ returns in person, sets up His temporal throne at Jerusalem and inaugurates His reign of a thousand years as a literal earthly monarch. When He comes the Jews will be gathered back to Jerusalem and be governed again by King David in person. The first resurrection of the saints, called " the Rapture," will occur at His coming and will precede the final and general resurrection by more than a thousand years.

You may recall that a few years ago when General

Allenby took possession of the Holy Land and England announced that the Jews would be permitted to re-establish a free state in Palestine, it was heralded from certain quarters as a fulfilment of prophecy. We were told that the Jews would rapidly assemble in the Holy Land in preparation for the coming Messiah. It must have been rather disconcerting the other day to read the declaration of Israel Zangwill, a one time ardent Zionist, that "political Zionism is dead," and that there can be no Jewish state in Palestine because all but four per cent of the land is owned by Arabs who have no disposition to part with it. Even should the land be bought from the Arab, there could still be no Jewish nation in Palestine, because England holds a mandate over the territory, and will not encourage an independent state. Zionism is largely financed from America, but the fact that only sixty-six Jews left America for Palestine in 1922, is not a very hopeful sign of an immediate Davidic Kingdom.

To come back to our text, read verses 4, 5 and 6 of this chapter. Note their contents with care. You will find not a syllable there that even hints at a pre-millennial return of Christ to earth, not a word about an earthly kingdom with its throne-center at Jerusalem, not a word about a bodily resurrection. John is not talking about bodies; he sees only souls, and they are seated on thrones in heaven. Who are they? Why, read it for yourself, "Such as had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus, — such as worshipped not the beast, neither his image." Recall that in an earlier vision John had seen the souls of martyrs under the altar of sacrifice crying to heaven for jus-

tice. Here he sees them on thrones reigning with Christ.

This mooted passage is, therefore, nothing more than a word of encouragement to those Christians who were facing martyrdom for refusing to bow before the image of the beast or burn incense to Caesar. John says, " Go to the block, if you must; shrink not back. It is the hour of your resurrection. A throne and a white robe await you." The rest of the dead lived not in John's vision, but the martyrs lived; of them he was sure. Over them the second or spiritual death, that is, the danger of being cut off from the mercy of God for renouncing Christ — that kind of death had no power over them.

I have no desire to discuss the merits or demerits of any millennial scheme. I do say, however, that a man who brings an unprejudiced mind to this passage will find not a scintilla of evidence for two resurrections. Dr. Snowden, of the Western Seminary, after carefully examining seven other passages in the New Testament upon which the theory rests, declares that, " The theory of two resurrections has not the slightest support in Scripture outside of this passage, and the passage itself does not affirm or imply or permit two literal resurrections."

Must we believe in a literal millennium of a thousand years during which Christ will reign a temporal king with headquarters at Jerusalem? Six times the expression, a " thousand years," occurs in this passage. Three times it refers to the binding of Satan, and three times to the reign of the martyred dead with Christ. Must we interpret this literally? Listen, there are

sixty-six books in the Bible and I have forgotten how many chapters and verses, but nowhere else between the covers of the Book do the words "a thousand years" occur, except in this highly figurative passage. If four verses had been omitted from this chapter, the idea of Christ reigning on earth for a thousand years would never have entered anybody's mind. To base an argument for a "limited resurrection" and a temporal reign of Christ on four verses "in a highly figurative passage in the most highly figurative book in the Bible" is rather precarious business; it is a house of straw built on sand, a groundless theory.

The Apocalypse is a picture book. The twentieth chapter is a picture chapter. It is drama with imaginary scenes and imaginary actors. By what right does anyone declare that everything in the passage is symbolic and figurative except the "thousand years," and that must be taken literally. Recall what was said in a previous lecture, the figure ten is a symbol of earthly completeness. Ten times ten times ten, the cube of ten, is a thousand, the symbol of multiple completeness. We believe it refers merely to a great period of time of unknown length, in which evil would be more and more restrained and the gospel increasingly triumphant.

At the seventh verse the curtain rings up a third time and we are confronted with an unexpected scene. *The Dragon is Unchained.* Satan is loosed out of prison. There is a fresh outburst of evil. The camp of the saints, the city of righteousness, is compassed again. After a long period of apparent triumph, when everyone had begun to think the victory was complete,

suddenly the dragon appears on the scene again. Napoleon comes back from Elba. The war is renewed with fresh vigor.

What does this scene teach? A very simple fact in the moral history of the race. No matter how long righteousness may seem to be in the ascendancy or how complete the victory, so long as human nature remains imperfect — as it must always be imperfect in this life — there will be danger of fresh outbreaks of evil from the bottomless pit of human passion. In 1913, on the Centennial of Commodore Perry's victory on Lake Erie, Canada joined with the United States in commemorating a hundred years of unbroken peace along the Canadian frontier. History has no parallel to that. Across an imaginary boundary line stretching three thousand miles from the Atlantic to the Pacific, separating two proud and prosperous peoples, for one hundred and ten years not a hostile gun has been fired, not a fighting regiment has marched. A future conflict with Canada is improbable, almost unthinkable. The war god is chained there, and will remain chained for a thousand years, so we hope and so we pray. But who so bold as to declare that a fresh outbreak of hostilities is impossible? Just so long as nations strive after material prosperity, covet one another's trade routes and compete for the world's markets, so long as the spirit of nationalism is cultivated at the expense of internationalism, just so long will nations face the grim danger of conflict. As the world goes to-day, Mars may break his chains any day on any international boundary line. So likewise while earth remains, and lust and envy, hatred and selfishness are

latent in human life, there will always be danger of moral reactions. The apostolic warning will ever be timely, "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men." The price of victory is eternal vigilance.

The final scene of the chapter opens with the eleventh verse. The earth has passed away. The starry heavens are gone. The Judge of all sits on "a great white throne." The sea and the grave give up their dead. All humanity stands before God in a perfect democracy. Class distinctions have utterly faded. Those whose names are written on the Great Register as citizens of the Kingdom of God pass into eternal glory. For the rest it is the lake of fire.

So John depicts the last act in the great drama of human history. There is a stern simplicity about the whole, with only enough scenic detail to make it impressive. The earth will end some day. Science enforces Scripture at that point. History will end; humanity will end. The time is God's secret; the fact is an open book. "Blessed are they that wash their robes that they may have the right" to stand unafraid before the throne of the Eternal.

XXI

PARADISE REGAINED

REVELATION 21:1–22:5

AND *he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain, great and high, and shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God.* Rev. 21:10.

XXI

PARADISE REGAINED

REVELATION 21:1–22:5

WE have now traveled a long and somewhat difficult road which has brought us at last to the shoulder of a high mountain where a ravishing scene breaks upon our vision. Back of us on the plains lie the carcasses of the Four Horses of the Apocalypse. Conquest, War, Famine and Pestilence are things of the past. The road over which we have come is covered with the ashes of extinct volcanoes, the debris of spent tornadoes, the wreckage of social earthquakes, the ruins of mystic Babylon and Godless empires. We have seen the Dragon, the Beast and the False Prophet plunged into a lake of fire. Sin and evil and human passion have spent their forces and have done their worst. Armageddon is ended. The Lamb of God is everywhere triumphant. What more remains? One thing more. Standing with John on the ridge of the mountain we are bidden to look on the closing scene in the drama of human history, the one far-off divine event toward which the whole creation moves. It is a city John sees at the end of the age, a new Jerusalem. New Jerusalem, indeed? Why not new Babylon, or new Rome, or new Paris, or new London, or new Chicago? Simply because John was a Jew, and to a Jew Jeru-

salem was a symbol of all that was good and true, and lovely and God-like. A saved world, a redeemed society with Christ at its center, was just Jerusalem enlarged, universalized, idealized, perfected.

Unless one has imagination he had better not climb the mountain with John to see this rapturous vision. It is no place for dull eyes and mechanical minds. If you have eyes that see and ears that hear, then come and look, listen and dream, and let this amazing vision have its way with your soul.

The first impression one gains is that New Jerusalem is *The City Beautiful.* The city John saw was no irregularly shaped affair. It was not like our modern cities, a mere conglomeration of disorderly buildings, with tall, costly structures massed at its center, while at the outskirts the city fades away to a few straggling buildings scattered along unimproved streets and muddy lanes. The City Beautiful was built along lines surveyed by a divine planning commission. Its development was controlled by the master mind of a Divine Architect.

Of course the City Beautiful had walls. All the great cities John had ever seen or heard of, were walled cities. But no city ever had such walls as John's imagination builds around New Jerusalem. Puny the measurements and crude the masonry of all other walled cities known to history. If we can believe Josephus, the walls of ancient Jerusalem measured thirty-three furlongs in circuit; the walls of Thebes, forty-three furlongs; Alexandria, eighty; Nineveh, four hundred; Babylon, four hundred and eighty. But the walls about The City Beautiful, were twelve

thousand furlongs in circuit, three hundred and seventy-five miles square. The only actual piece of masonry known to history that is comparable in size with the walls of New Jerusalem was the Great Wall of China. For fifteen hundred miles, so we are told, that prodigious mass of masonry went writhing over hills and valleys, across plains and mountains, enclosing a country of more than one hundred and forty thousand square miles. The Chinese wall was three hundred years old when John wrote. Had John actually seen it? Certainly not. By a strange coincidence, however, the walls of New Jerusalem, one hundred and forty-four cubits, two hundred and sixteen feet high, ran four square for a distance of fifteen hundred miles, enclosing not a sparsely settled country but a densely populated city covering an area of more than one hundred and forty thousand square miles. No such actual city has ever been seen on earth, nor ever will be seen. I say again, if you have no imagination, turn your eyes away from this vision, leave the mountain; it is no place for you.

The walls had twelve gates, each gate a pearl. On the north three pearly gates, on the south three pearly gates, on the east three and on the west three. Each gate was dedicated to one of the twelve tribes of Israel. Turn to Exodus and read the story of Israel's journey through the wilderness. So they marched and thus they camped, three tribes on the north, three on the south, three on the east and three on the west, forming a perfect square, at the center of which was the Holy Tabernacle. The materials of John's dreams are nine parts taken from the Old Testament.

The city had twelve immense, impregnable foundation stones, three under each wall, and each stone dedicated to one of the twelve apostles, the men to whom was committed a gospel upon which the whole structure of Christian civilization stands. Can there be any doubt about John's meaning? New Jerusalem is the church triumphant, a redeemed society, spiritual humanity with Christ at its center, including the redeemed of both dispensations.

No man has ever had a gift of tongue or pen that enabled him to add anything to John's description of the dazzling wonder of The City Beautiful. Some one in scorn has called the chapter "a jeweler's shop," so dull his imagination. Walls of jasper, gates of pearl, streets of gold, foundations scintillating with all manner of precious stones. "Language falters to tell its glory and beauty." If we gather together everything that we know is rare and beautiful and precious, and blend it all in one magnificent picture, we have something similar to the scene John describes. All the rare metals and precious stones known to the ancient world are requisitioned to set forth the glory and wonder of The City Beautiful. And can you not imagine when John flashed the light of that glory scene into some cave or dungeon, or into some dark room where a group of Christians were huddled in terror behind locked doors, how they would forget their bonds, their fears, their sufferings, and sing with raptured soul, "Glory to God in the highest?" And wherever the vision awakened a song in the night, John was satisfied. His heart leaped for joy. He was writing for that purpose.

But New Jerusalem is not merely The City Beautiful; more than that and better than that it is *The Holy City*. To stand with John on the mountain and see the city in its far and fadeless glory, meant rapture of soul. But to live within its walls where angel guards kept vigil at the gates, to share in its life, to walk its golden streets, to drink from the River of Eternal Life that rolls through it, and to eat of the fruit of the tree that grows on its banks, think what that would mean, aye, and what it meant to those early Christians. Can you not hear even now the faint note of a far-away song as some one in his dungeon sings, "That will be glory for me"?

History knows all about mystic Babylons. It knows nothing of holy cities. For five thousand years man has lived in Babylonized communities. Through all the habitations of men the dragon has left his slimy trail. Think what it will mean to live in a city where there are no fearful folk, no timid souls, not a single moral coward, a city in which every citizen will have the courage of his convictions. And no unbelievers there, no idolators, no profane persons, no prodigal sons or wayward daughters, no haters of their fellows; not a murderer nor an adulterer, nor a thief, nor a liar, nor a covetous person. Therefore, a city without criminal laws, no civil courts, no police to maintain order, no jails, no penitentiaries, and no mounting crime bills to be paid by the righteous. Income taxes will be reduced to a minimum in The Holy City. No doubt about that. More wonderful still, no class distinctions will be there, no exclusive residence sections for the rich, and no segregated vice areas for the poor. No

Boweries, no Ghettoes, no Little Italies, no Lyndoras, no Soho Hills, no "aliens to the commonwealth of Israel"; a city in which every citizen will be native born, that is "born again," and having his name written legibly on the great register of the Lamb's Book of Life.

Listen again. There will be "no more sea," Why, John, how is that? Many of us love the sea, love it for boating and bathing, for fishing and voyaging. For us the sea is the broad free highway of earth's commerce. But to John the sea was something entirely different. It was the home of the beast, the region of storms. To John the sea meant cruel separation, isolation, loneliness. "No more sea," says John, "to separate a pastor from his flock." And no curse any more. We shall no longer be in terror for "the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday." No sickbeds, no medicine bottles, no apothecaries' shops, no more quarantine signs on our doors, no more need for doctors and nurses. "And death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain any more." No deathbeds, no scalding tears, no more gray caskets or draped couches, no funeral processions, no graves, nor cemeteries. Nothing "shall hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." "Why," says John, "The Holy City shall be perfectly free from every hurtful thing in the whole black catalog of human ills." Dreaming? Yes, dreaming, but dreaming John's dream. Let those laugh who

will, but somehow the world cannot get on, life is stagnant without its dreams and dreamers.

Before dismissing this chapter we must raise and try to answer two questions:

First, why this glory scene? Why did the seer write this chapter? What purpose had he in painting this dream city of New Jerusalem? A very practical purpose, I assure you, the same purpose that runs through every other paragraph in the book. The Revelation was not written as a riddle or a puzzle to furnish pious amusement for twentieth-century saints. It had a more immediate and a more serious purpose than that. Every scene in the entire book was painted primarily for a generation of persecuted Christians. The twenty-first chapter is no exception. It was written to inspire patience and courage and endurance. The seer in this chapter is talking to some poor suffering disciple bound in prison and facing death, wondering whether he ought to renounce his faith and live, or hold to his faith and die, and John is saying, "Brother, before you decide that question, come up here on the mountain with me and let us take a look at The Holy City." As they stand there together in rapture, the aged apostle lifts his hand and points away toward that glory scene, saying, "He that endureth, whoever holds fast his faith and refuses to flinch in the presence of death or devils shall inherit all that." He is all the time trying to create in the soul of every tried Christian a conviction that would enable him to say with Paul, "I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed."

Second, What is New Jerusalem and where will it be? Is it a picture of heaven or some future state on earth? Some think it refers neither to heaven nor earth, but rather to "a supernatural starry existence." Whether it will be in Mars or in Jupiter, or in the moon or in some as-yet-uncreated celestial body, is not quite clear to them — nor to us. That sort of thing illustrates perfectly a certain type of interpretation which has caused many an intelligent seeker after truth to turn away from the Apocalypse in disgust. There are a lot of pious folk, very good people, most of them better than their theories, who are all the time wanting to read an unnatural, unearthly, mystical, ghostly meaning into the chapters of Revelation.

Let us be perfectly sure in our own minds that New Jerusalem represents a future state either in heaven or on earth. Why not both? There are things here which you and I will never know or experience until we get to heaven. For that reason we naturally turn to this chapter to find words of comfort for those whose hearts go lonely amid the shadows of death. But what does John say? Read it again. "One of the seven angels — shewed me the holy city Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God." "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth," blending in one on the far horizon of time. New Jerusalem is heaven, but a heaven latent in earth, just as mystic Babylon is hell, but a hell latent in earth. Of course I know what you are thinking. No such city or social state as John describes will ever be possible on this earth. You may be right. The chapter is written in figurative language. Nevertheless, as things go now-a-days, with fresh

miracles confronting us every morning, he is a very bold man who dares predict what man's state on earth will be a thousand years hence.

Ever since Abram left Ur of the Chaldees to find a better country, a land flowing with milk and honey, men have dreamed of a better state, a new earth, a "golden age." Five hundred years before John wrote his Vision, Plato dreamed his "Republic" in which he predicted a future state founded on absolute justice, equality of the sexes, and communism of social interest. Was it all an idle dream? Three hundred years after Patmos, Augustine saw ancient Rome crash to its final ruin. Sitting amid the wreckage of a pagan civilization he wrote his "City of God," a vision of a spiritual city, a Christian civilization rising out of the past and destined to include all the Kingdoms of earth. Was it only a dream? It was not enough for Milton to write "Paradise Lost," he must write also its sequel, "Paradise Regained." The scene of the one is laid in the distant past, the other is in the dim future. Sir Thomas More paints his dream island of Utopia. An impossible ideal? Grant it, has a poet's dream no practical value? In the last chapter of "The Outline of History," the historian assumes the rôle of prophet. H. G. Wells can not close his record of the past until he has told the world his dream of the future. Like Peter of old, we who know Christ, "according to promise, look for a new heaven and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," a city that hath foundation, whose builder and maker is God.

The Bible talks about three worlds, God's world as it was, God's world as it is, and God's world as it shall

be. Genesis 1:31, "God saw everything that He had made, and behold it was very good." So it was in the beginning. Romans 8:22, "The whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain." So it is now. Revelation 21:5, "Behold, I make all things new." So it shall be, "a new heaven and a new earth."

What would you take, my friend, to allow me to tear one page from your Bible, and that one page the 21st chapter of Revelation? Why, you would go through the rest of your days with a haunting sense of loss. Your Bible would henceforth be a symphony with a "lost chord." It would be like dropping the "Gloria" song from Mozart's "Twelfth Mass," or losing the "Hallelujah Chorus" from Handel's "Messiah." You may not be able to imagine or comprehend all there is in this chapter, but somehow you can not keep away from it, and you would not if you could. It pours a healing balm upon your wounded heart, it sings its sweetness into your hurt soul, and "satisfies your longing as nothing else can do."

XXII

THE BENEDICTION

REVELATION 22:6–21

THE *grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen.* Rev. 22:21.

XXII

THE BENEDICTION

REVELATION 22:6–21

MORE than eighteen hundred years ago, John, son of Zebedee, prophet, seer, author, lover of God and servant of Christ, went home to glory. How he died or where he was buried no man knows. But this all men know, the world is a better place to live in, life is richer and more hopeful because he lived and served, and heaven is nearer because he thought and dreamed and wrote. Before he lay down to sleep at the close of a long, busy day he had bequeathed to the world five priceless manuscripts, a Gospel of love, three matchless letters and the drama of Revelation. Taken together or taken singly, they form an invaluable contribution to the religious literature of the world. The seer of Patmos was fittingly honored with the privilege of writing the closing words to the Canon of Scripture, and in behalf of all the sacred writers to pronounce the final benediction, " The grace of our Lord Jesus be with you all. Amen."

In the closing sixteen verses of Revelation, John is concerned mainly with three things. He is thinking of the book he has written, the Christ he has presented and the souls for whom he yearns. The chapter records the Last Words of John, the Last Words of Jesus and the Last Words of Inspiration.

I. *The Last Word of John* is a word of caution regarding the book he has written. The aged apostle is leaving on a long voyage. He will not come back. Ere he departs he bequeaths to the world a book into the writing of which he has put his best effort. It embodies his deepest faith, his brightest vision, his richest experience, his ripest knowledge. In his "Last Will and Testament," he says, "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book." Do not regard the vision as if it were intended only for you who first read it. Pass it on. Do not lay it aside as though it were not intended to be read and understood. Do not frighten people away from it by reading things into its chapters that are not there. If any man adds to or subtracts from the book, if any man for whatever reason, purposely twists its meaning, let that man suffer the plagues that are written therein, and let him be anathema from the Tree of Life and let his name be erased from the Lamb's Book of Life.

It is a stern word spoken by an author who is conscious of a divine mission. It is placed here for the obvious purpose of preserving the integrity of the book. Translated into the language of a modern publisher it would read, "Copyrighted 96 A.D. All rights reserved." Against whom or against what circumstance was the author trying to protect his work?

Is it merely a word of warning to careless transcribers? Doubtless it had a sobering effect on many a scribe as he copied the manuscript. Few of us can appreciate with what tedious, painstaking, laborious work the New Testament writings were preserved and propagated during those early centuries. It is a far

cry from the modern linotype machine and rotary press back to the stylus of an ancient scribe. The art of printing with movable type was not discovered until the fifteenth century. It is almost inconceivable that for fourteen hundred years the Scriptures were promulgated and handed down from one generation to another by scribes who copied the manuscripts with ink and pen, word for word. Under the circumstances it was a miracle that no serious errors, and few errors of any kind crept into the original text. As a matter of fact, many a scribe in copying a chapter wrote an explanatory note in the margin opposite some verse, even as you do in the margin of your Bible. In the course of time, as the page was copied and re-copied and copied again, there was danger lest an uninspired comment should slip into the inspired text. John lived longer than any of the other writers and doubtless had seen the possible danger from that source. He did not want anyone to tinker with the record of his vision. Therefore this warning against the inaccuracies of careless transcribers.

But surely the warning reaches further than that. A transcriber writing at midnight by the dim light of a candle was certainly not guilty of a crime for which he deserved to be anathematized if he unwittingly made an error in copy. The warning stands here like the sword of the angel that guarded the gates of Paradise. It forbids careless approach; it prevents idle curiosity. It pronounces a woe upon any who would trifle with the record, or who in the interest of some pet theory would give the vision a false meaning and thus mislead the church into false hopes. The warning

is so stern and solemn that it might discourage any attempt whatsoever at exposition were it not for the accompanying word, "Seal not up the words of the prophecy of this book," and for this additional word that stands at the entrance to the book, "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of the prophecy, and keep the things that are written therein."

II. *The Last Word of Christ,* spoken by the inspired pen of John, is a word of witness to himself. Do you recall the last words of Jesus on Calvary? "It is finished." But that was not His final word. Recall also the last words of Christ on the mountain before he ascended to the Father. "Go ye thereforth and teach all nations, . . . and lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the age." Neither was that his final word. The very last reported words of Christ were spoken on Patmos by inspiration, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end." "I am the root and the offspring of David; the bright, the morning star," and "Behold, I come quickly."

When John awoke from his dream there in his island home he found himself back in the old world again, the old perverse world of the dragon, the beast and the false prophet, a world largely given over to "dogs, sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, idolaters and liars." It may have been a rude awakening for the apostle, and probably was, but he was not discouraged. He knew Christ was there also, not very far away. The vision fades in a rough world of stern realities, but Christ remains. That is enough. John had ascended to the highest heavens, and found Christ there. He

descended to the lowest depths; Christ was there. On the light of the morning, with the wings of imagination he flew to the utmost bounds of time and space, and Christ was always visible, everywhere present. Neither conquest, war, famine or pestilence, "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature" had been able to dim the seer's vision of that radiant figure of the white Christ. When the vision faded and John awoke from his dream, the one clear impression, the one deep conviction, that remained was that Christ is "The Prince of the House of David," the Lion of Judah. But more than that, infinitely more, He is the Morning Star of human hope, the star that shines with greatest brilliancy in the darkest hour of the night. He is Alpha and Omega, the first letter and the last letter in the alphabet of human history, the sum and substance of life and progress. He was there in the beginning with God and He will be there in the end. Aye, and He will come again, will come suddenly, unexpectedly, with startling effect, on trailing clouds of glory, gathering into omnipotent hands all the reins of power and authority. Overwhelmed with the conviction, yielding to his emotions, John cries to heaven, "Even so come, Lord Jesus."

Will He come indeed? Can we believe it? One thing seems certain, there will be some kind of grand crisis to history. Life is not stationary. Civilization is not static. Tidal movements are beneath us. The winds are in our sails. We are going somewhere, brother. Whither? Faith says, and it has always said,

"The reign of Christ is the goal of the ages." I warrant you, that is a brave thing to believe in any age. It is a big thing to believe now. It was an immensely bigger thing for John to believe it. Only a man of heroic soul, with deep convictions, unshakable faith and a rich experience, could preach that truth in John's day. If the seer of Patmos, at the close of the first century, could believe in the final and complete victory of Christ, when the followers of Christ were a negligible group, a despised minority; when churches were few and far between; when "few of the multi-millions of mankind had ever heard the name of Christ"; when every government on earth was anti-Christ; when there was little hope and no visible sign of His coming; then shall you not believe it and shall I not preach it at the beginning of the twentieth century, when Christians are in the ascendancy; when churches and chapels, abbeys and cathedrals are everywhere the architectural pride of the world; when Christ is being preached to all the multi-millions of mankind, when every civilized government on earth is based on the ethics of the Gospel, when the Christ spirit of service increasingly dominates all avenues of life, and when everywhere, in high places and in low, men are saying, It must be Christ, Christ! or it will be chaos; Jehovah or Baal, religion or ruin? For myself, I can not believe in a little gospel. I believe it is a big gospel, as big as the infinite power of God. I can not preach, and will not preach a little Christ. My Christ is big, as big as the infinite love of God. I can not believe that Armageddon will be Waterloo for the King of Kings. May I tell you why I can not believe it?

I have visited John on Patmos; I have talked with him and he has talked with my soul. Faith is kindled, vision is clarified, conviction is unshaken.

"How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,
Is laid for your faith in His excellent word;
What more can He say than to you He hath said,
To you who for refuge to (Patmos) have fled?"

III. *The Last Word of Inspiration* is a word of invitation. For the last time, and with its last breath, the Book heralds the gospel call, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." For the last time the Gospel bells peal forth the invitation, "Come."

If a man prefers to be unrighteous, let him prefer it. If a man would rather be filthy than clean, let him be filthy. If a man does not want to be a saint, let him be a sinner. But all the time Christ is saying, "Happy are they that wash their robes that they may have the right to come to the tree of life." All the time the Spirit is saying, "Come." The bride, that is, the church, is saying, "Come." It is her first business to do so. She may at times be obliged to resist evil sternly and fight for her faith bravely, but fighting is not her primary mission. A bride is not robed in white that she may fight. It is hers to be winsome. The church as the bride of the Lamb is to win souls. Hers merely to throw open the doors, multiply the seats around the holy altar and make welcome the sons and the daughters of men. "And he that heareth, let him say come." Study your marching orders, Christian friend. They are, in sum and substance, "Go," and

" Say come." " And he that is athirst, let him come." Are you thirsty for the deeper springs of life? Struggle as you please for your rights, strive as you may for the prizes of life, you will find in the end as countless others have found, that soul thirst is never quenched until you draw near to Christ. Hear the call, " Come." The old Book with its long story reaching from Genesis to Revelation, beautifully closes with a grand chorus of " Comes," because the Book knows there can be no " new heaven and new earth," no Holy City, no New Jerusalem, no redeemed society, until men wash their robes white in the blood of the Lamb and become citizens of heaven.

We bring our study to a close. Have you ever read a book that held you enthralled? Now and then a volume falls into my own hand which I lay aside reluctantly even when the clock in the tower strikes twelve. I have sometimes felt almost rebellious at an author's curt, blunt word, " Finis." Many a time, after finishing a book, have I leafed fondly through its pages, dipping into its chapters here and there as though an unsatisfied thirst was still calling for fresh draughts from its springs of truth. Something like that is my feeling this morning. All week in preparing this sermon I have had a strange feeling of loneliness as though parting from an old friend or leaving some rare mountain scene. I should like to go through its chapters again. By no means have we exhausted its messages. We have only touched the high places. But enough for the present. Henceforth let this strange book with its matchless vision be " a lamp

unto our feet and a light unto our pathway," until we go where Christ is or He comes where we are.

Humbly we kneel before the aged apostle as he departs to be with Christ, and with outstretched hands pronounces the final benediction:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with you all."

"AMEN."

17,996

a Revelation.

1. Is it to be interpreted Symbolically?

2. Four things clear

a A Church under persecution always.

The Babe + the dragon,
The War in heaven
Herod + Babe,
~~Ascension~~ Nativity = Calvary

(b). The Dragon Nations of this world

(c) Apostate religion = scarlet woman Church + State,

(d) An ever present Christ = alpha + Omega
The Lamb + birth
The Conqueror

(e). A Victorious church = Marriage Feast

3. Jno's little Book = Swallowed
= Preach word
Teach the word
Incarnate the Word.

4. And Behold I come quickly
The Inviting church.

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